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TRANSLATIONS ON USSR MILITARY AFFAIRS  
(FOUO 9/79)  
THE SIXTEENTH AIR ARMY

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## TRANSLATIONS ON USSR MILITARY AFFAIRS

(FOUO 9/79)

### THE SIXTEENTH AIR ARMY

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A.A. Vasil'yev, I.I. Ivanov, F.S. Luchkin and G.O. Komarov  
(deceased), Voenizdat, 40,000 copies, 393 pages. The book is  
subtitled: "A Military Historical Essay on the Campaign  
Record of the 16th Air Army (1942-1945)"]

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Frequently encountered abbreviations found in this work:

16th AA--16th Air Army  
Arkhir MO SSSR--Archives of the USSR Ministry of Defense

bad--bomber air division  
bak--bomber air corps  
bao--airfield service battalion  
bap--bomber air regiment

CMG--Cavalry Mechanized Corps

Hq SHC--Headquarters, Supreme High Command

lad--fighter air division  
lak--fighter air corps  
lap--fighter air regiment

lbap--light bomber air regiment

nbad--night bomber air division  
nbap--night bomber air regiment  
NKO--People's Commissar[iat] of Defense

odrap--detached long-distance reconnaissance air regiment  
okrae--detached correction and reconnaissance air squadron  
okrap--detached correction and reconnaissance air regiment  
oraе--detached reconnaissance air squadron

RAB--regional air base  
RGK--High Command Reserve

sad--mixed air division  
sak--mixed air corps  
SCAA--small-caliber antiaircraft artillery  
shad--assault air division  
shak--assault air corps  
shap--assault air regiment

trap--air transport regiment  
utap--training regiment

VKP(b)--All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik)  
VNOS--aircraft warning service  
VPU--auxiliary control point

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ANNOTATION

[Text] The book describes the glorious campaign record of the 16th Air Army [AA] during the years of the Great Patriotic War.

The pilots of the 16th AA defeated the Nazi invaders at Stalingrad and Kursk, in the Ukraine and Belorussia, in the skies over fraternal Poland, and they participated in the Berlin Operation, always firmly maintaining air superiority.

The aviators of the AA made around 290,000 combat sorties. Over 200 pilots and navigators received the title of Hero of the Soviet Union, and more than 27,000 aviators were presented governmental decorations.

The book has been written on the basis of the archival materials and memoirs of the veterans of the past war. It is designed for a broad range of readers.

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FOR OUR SOVIET MOTHERLAND!

The campaign record of the units and formations of the 16th AA during the years of the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union against fascist Germany and its satellites is wreathed in undying military glory.

Organized upon the order of the USSR People's Commissar of Defense in August 1942, on the shores of the great Russian river, the Volga, the 16th AA participated in the great Battle of Stalingrad initially as part of the troops of the Stalingrad Front, and from September 1942, as part of the Don Front.

During the first days of its existence, the AA had a total of 4 air divisions and 2 separate air squadrons which had 152 combat-ready aircraft.

Regardless of the difficult situation in the air, the flight personnel of the AA in the battle against the fascist invaders showed examples of bravery, heroism and profound awareness of military duty. The air formations of the 16th AA provided tangible air support to the troops of the front during the period of the unprecedented defense of the hero city and subsequently in the counteroffensive and defeat of the surrounded Nazi army 330,000 strong in the region of Stalingrad.

In the summer of 1943, in the very fierce Battle of Kursk, the formations of the 16th AA, in actively supporting and providing air cover to the troops of the Central Front, helped thwart the plans of the enemy who was expecting to gain revenge for the defeat at Stalingrad. The 16th AA and the air armies of the adjacent fronts cooperating with it won the battle for air superiority.

After the defeat of the Nazi troops on the Kursk Salient, the 16th AA provided air support for the troops of the Central Front (later the Belorussian and First Belorussian fronts) in the summer-autumn and winter campaigns of 1943-1944 on the Konotop-Kiev, Chernigov-Mozyr' and Gomel'--Bobruysk sectors.

In the summer of 1944, the AA which had grown by more than 10-fold over the 2 years, in close coordination with the ground forces, carried out active combat to defeat the Nazis in the offensive operations on the territory of Belorussia and in the eastern regions of Poland, in firmly maintaining air superiority.

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In January-February 1945, the AA participated in the offensive of the troops of the First Belorussian Front, having provided enormous support to them in surrounding and destroying the enemy troops in the battles on the path from the Vistula to the Oder on the Warsaw--Kustrin sector. Then the AA aided the troops of the front in defeating the Eastern Pomeranian enemy grouping.

And finally, having received reinforcements from the Reserve of the High Command (RGK), the 16th AA with the forces of around 30 air divisions (over 3,000 combat aircraft), as part of the troops of the First Belorussian Front and in cooperation with the air armies of the adjacent fronts, participated in the concluding battle, the Berlin Operation which ended with the final defeat of Nazi Germany.

Thus, the aviators of the 16th AA participated in battles and engagements against the enemy on the main strategic sectors of the Soviet-German Front, having made over 288,000 combat sorties for the campaign record.

The aviators of the 16th AA, in acquiring and creatively using the experience of the front, constantly improved the forms and methods of the combat use of the various branches of aviation and developed to perfection cooperation with the ground forces.

They made a weighty contribution to developing the theory of operational art and tactics of the Soviet Air Force.

The commanders, the political workers and the party organizations of the AA units were active proponents of the policy of the Communist Party. They organized and inspired the military aviators to a sacred struggle against fascism, they indoctrinated in the personnel boldness and courage, valor and readiness for self-sacrifice, a total loyalty to the Soviet motherland and hate for its enemies, and were constantly concerned with the strengthening of discipline and organization.

The personnel of the AA possessed a strong morale and excelled in combat enthusiasm and an unrestrained aggressive drive. The pilots and navigators, the gunners and radio operators, engineers and technicians, the mechanics and other specialists and the men of the aviation rear support services honorably carried out their duty to the motherland.

By their heroic feats, the men of the AA, the fighter and assault plane pilots, the bomber pilots and scouts, inscribed indelible pages in the military chronicle of the Soviet Armed Forces. More than 30 flight crews repeated the immortal feats of the Russian pilot P. N. Nesterov and the communist pilot N. F. Gastello, in ramming the enemy in the air and on the ground.

The communists and Komsomol members have always been in the vanguard of the air fighters of the AA. Their number increased continuously. Over the period from August 1942 through May 1945, 20,275 of the best aviators joined the ranks of the Communist Party and 4,735 became Komsomol members.

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The heroism and military skill of the personnel in the 16th AA were properly praised by the party and government. For the exemplary execution of combat missions of the command on the front in combating the Nazi invaders and for the valor and heroism shown in this, 200 pilots and navigators were awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union, 3 received this twice, and 1 received a third Gold Star. Among the holders of the Red Star were Russians and Belorussians, Ukrainians and Georgians, Armenians, Osetians and men from other nationalities. More than 27,000 aviators were awarded orders and medals of the USSR for military excellence.

The capital of our motherland, Moscow, 53 times saluted with artillery salvos the valorous troops of the Central, Belorussian and First Belorussian fronts, and here in the congratulatory orders of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, the outstanding formations and units of the 16th AA were mentioned 47 times.

Many air formations and units of the AA in fierce battles against the fascist invaders rightly earned the title of guards (one out of every three regiments became guards). Three air formations and units received the Order of Lenin, and 93 received the Order of the Red Banner, 61 received the Order of Suvorov, 22 the Order of Kutuzov, 11 the Order of Aleksandr Nevskiy, 4 the Order of Bodgan Khmel'nitskiy and 14 the Order of the Red Star. Subsequently the 16th AA became Red Banner.

Virtually all the formations and units were awarded honorary names such as Volga and Stalingrad, Bakhmach and Nezhin, Chernigov and Gomel', Mozyr' and Rechitsa, Bobruysk and Brest, Prague and Warsaw, Lodz and Brandenburg, Pomeranian, Berlin and others (a total of 64 honorary names).

Many prominent leaders of the Air Force were promoted from among the front line aviation commanders of the 16th AA.

Many glorious air aces laid down their lives in the battles against the Nazi invaders. The surviving comrades-in-arms held sacred the bright memory of the heroes who died a death of the brave for the happiness of future generation ..

The guns fell silent.... Thousands of aviators upon reaching the given age were discharged into the reserves or retired, thousands worked in the national economy and took an active part in social work and in the military patriotic indoctrination of the youth.

Many years after the end of the war the former personnel have not lost their frontline friendship. The meetings in Moscow and Monino in August 1967 and 1972 timed for the occasion of the 25th and 30th anniversary of the formation of the army were memorable for many of the now gray-haired soldiers.

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The glorious combat traditions of the aviators in the 16th AA are carefully preserved and added to by the men of the Soviet Air Force. The heirs of the military glory of their fathers and grandfathers possess modern equipment, they are increasing their combat readiness and in close cooperation with the men of the fraternal socialist countries vigilantly guard the air frontiers of the nations of the socialist camp, and the peaceful labor of our people who are building communism. They are always ready to repel any aggressor.

On the basis of archival documents, the memoirs of the military chiefs and the direct participants in the events as well as the personal memoirs of the authors, this book briefly tells of the air operations and feats of the men in the 16th AA in the engagements against the enemy on the difficult path from the Volga to the Elba in 1942-1945.



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CHAPTER 1: IN THE BATTLE ON THE VOLGA

Baptism by Fire

The second year of the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet people against the Nazi invaders began under extremely difficult conditions for the Red Army. The enemy, having concentrated a large troop grouping on the southern wing of the Soviet-German Front, seized the strategic initiative and in the summer of 1942 began a major offensive intending to reach the Volga, capture the oil fields of the Northern Caucasus and sever the lines of communications linking the center of the nation with the south.

In the Stalingrad sector, fierce battles raged. The enemy possessed superiority in personnel and equipment, particularly in tanks and aviation. Again, as in the previous year, the Soviet troops experienced the bitterness of retreat. By the middle of July, the Nazi troops had initiated battles in the bend of the Don, endeavoring to break through to Stalingrad and capture it.

The threatening situation which was developing in the south of our nation caused great alarm among all the Soviet people. On 28 July 1942, the People's Commissar of Defense (NKO) I. V. Stalin issued Order No 227 in which he demanded that the enemy advance be halted by the Soviet troops at any price. "The time has come to end the retreat. Not another step back!" demanded the order of the motherland.

The question of creating a strong and active defense in the Stalingrad sector at that time was at the center of attention of the Soviet command. The order of the NKO of 8 August 1942 marked the start of organizing the 16th AA. Maj Gen Avn P. S. Stepanov (a member of the Military Council of the Red Army Air Force) was appointed temporary commander, the regimental commissar A. S. Vinogradov was the military commissar, and Maj Gen Avn S. I. Rudenko was the deputy commander.

However, because of the deteriorating situation around Stalingrad, the organization of the new AA was delayed. Moreover, regardless of the dividing of the Stalingrad Front into two (Stalingrad and Southeastern) on 5 August, both fronts continued to be under the troop commander of the Southeastern

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Front, while the aviation was under the commander of the 8th AA. At that time all their attention was focused on repelling the assault on Stalingrad.

Only on 1 September were Gens P. S. Stepanov and S. I. Rudenko summoned to Kamyshin were the representatives of the Headquarters, Supreme High Command [Sq SHC], Gens G. K. Zhukov and A. A. Novikov, announced to them the final decision to accelerate the organization of the 16th AA. Since the army simultaneously was also to engage in combat, Gen P. S. Stepanov was ordered to be concerned with the organizational questions, while Gen S. I. Rudenko was to direct the operations of the air formations and units of the newly organized AA.

Having returned to the army command post at Stalingradskiy Sovkhoz, Gen S. I. Rudenko ordered the start of operations of the 16th AA as part of the troops of the Stalingrad Front which were under the command of Lt Gen V. N. Gordov.

On 28 September 1942, Gen S. I. Rudenko was appointed the commander of the 16th AA.

Sergey Ignat'yevich Rudenko had great experience in life before becoming a prominent military leader. He was born in 1904 in the Chernigov area in a poor artisan family. At the age of 19, under a Komsomol assignment, he volunteered for the aviation school and in 1927 received the rank of military pilot. In the following year he was admitted to the VKP(b) [All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik)]. Over the years his flying skills grew, and his operational-tactical training and the art of controlling air units improved. In 1932, S. I. Rudenko completed the command faculty, and several years later, the operations faculty of the Air Force Academy imeni N. Ye. Zhukovskiy, and was appointed the commander of an air brigade. In 1936, he received the Order of Lenin for high successes in military and political training.

At the outset of the Great Patriotic War, Col S. I. Rudenko commanded the 31st Air Division which in July had already engaged the Nazi invaders in combat. In October 1941, for successful leadership of combat, he was given the rank of major general aviation. He was subsequently the commander of the air force of the 61st Army and the air force of the Kalinin Front, the commander of the 7th Assault Air Group of Hq SHC, the deputy commander of the 8th AA, and the deputy commander and commander of the 16th AA, following it until the victorious May 1945. In this position his organizational talent was particularly apparent.

The entire personnel of the 16th AA knew their commander as a principled communist, energetic and enterprising, strong willed and demanding, but always tactful, responsive and amiable commander. In possessing high operational-tactical training, boldness and decisiveness, he creatively approached the solution to the most important questions of the combat use of aviation. In his work he always relied on the political apparatus and on the party organizations.

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In the postwar years S. I. Rudenko commanded the aviation of a military district, he was the chief of the Air Force Chief Staff, the commander of the long-range aviation, and then for many years, the first deputy commander-in-chief of the Air Force. He was repeatedly elected a deputy of the USSR Supreme Soviet and the RSFSR Supreme Soviet. At the 22d CPSU Congress, he was elected a candidate member of the CPSU Central Committee. The Communist Party and the Soviet government have had high regard for the military activities and long service of S. I. Rudenko, having awarded him the Gold Star of the Hero of the Soviet Union, five Orders of Lenin, four Orders of the Red Banner, three Orders of Suvorov First and Second Degree, the Order of Kutuzov First Degree, and many medals. By the Ukase of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet of 11 March 1955 he was awarded the military rank of marshal of aviation. At present the Hero of the Soviet Union, Mar Avn S. I. Rudenko heads the Red Banner Order of Kutuzov Air Force Academy imeni Yu. A. Gagarin.

Aleksay Sergeyevich Vinogradov was born in 1900 in Ivanovo-Voznosensk, in a worker family. At the age of 18 he joined the Red Army and took an active part in the Civil War. In 1924, he retired to the reserves. During the same year he joined the ranks of the RKP(b) [Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik)]. In 1932, upon completing the Komvuz [Communist Institution of Higher Learning], he was again inducted into the army for political work. During the first year of the war, regimental commissar A. S. Vinogradov held the position of military commissar of the 40th Air Division, the 2nd Reserve Air Brigade and then the 1st Fighter Air Army of Hq SHC. Being the military commissar and then the deputy commander of the 16th AA for political affairs, he reached Berlin itself with it.

The process of organizing the 16th AA continued until 4 September. By that time two air divisions, the 220th and 228th, had been transferred from the 8th AA to the 16th. The 220th fighter air division (iad) included the 43d, 211th, 237th, 512th, 581st and 867th air regiments (iap) with Yak-1 aircraft and later the 291st iap with LaGG-3 (commander of the air division, Lt Col A. V. Utin, military commissar, regimental commissar P. V. Baryshev, and chief of staff, Col A. A. Semenov).

The 288th Assault Air Division (shad) included the 688th, 694th, 783d and later the 285th air regiments (shap) with Il-2 aircraft (commander, Col V. V. Stepichev, and from October, Lt Col G. O. Komarov, military commissar, brigade commissar, I. D. Kobayakin, and chief of staff, Col I. A. Trushin).

Simultaneously from the Headquarters Reserve, the 16th AA received two other air divisions: the 283d iad consisting of the 431st, 520th, 563d and later the 812th iap with Yak-1 aircraft (commander, Col V. A. Katayev, military commissar, senior battalion commissar N. L. Khodyrev and chief of staff, Lt Col A. A. Savinov) and the 291st Mixed Air Division sad) under the command of Hero of the Soviet Union, Lt Col A. N. Vitruk (military commissar, senior battalion commissar, P. I. Petrov, and chief of staff, Lt Col F. M. Sedov). The latter consisted of the 243d and 245th shap with Il-2 aircraft

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and the 30th Bomber Air Regiment (bap) with Pe-2; later this regiment was replaced by the 313th shap. The 954th shap arrived later and the division began to be termed an assault division.

By the start of September, the AA also had the 598th and 970th light bomber air regiments (lbap) with Po-2 aircraft. Subsequently they became night regiments.

As a total by 4 September, the 16th AA had 152 aircraft in flying condition, including 42 fighters, 79 assault planes and 31 light bombers.

The AA was based at the field airfields to the north of Stalingrad under difficult conditions, since the zone near the front was saturated to the maximum with troops and various rear bodies.

The personnel which arrived to organize the AA was seized with the noble desire to overcome all the difficulties in the shortest time, to complete the organization and participate in the battle against the hated enemy.

As a total the air force of the Stalingrad sector (the 8th and 16th AA and the 102d Air Defense iad) had 738 aircraft, including 133 daytime bombers, 71 night bombers, 241 assault planes and 313 fighters. In addition to them, this sector systematically received 150-200 long-range bombers.

The enemy aviation in the Stalingrad sector numbered over 1,200 aircraft which were part of the 4th Air Force and the 8th Air Corps. They were armed with the Ju-87, Ju-88 and He-111 bombers; the Me-109 and Me-110 fighters and a small number of FW-190; the Hs-126 and FW-189 reconnaissance planes. Superiority in the number of aircraft in the Stalingrad sector was on the side of the German Luftwaffe. The fascist aviation had air superiority.

The headquarters of the 16th AA was organized on 15 August basically from the leadership of the First Fighter Air Army of Hq SHC and initially was located in Stalingrad. The staff, the basic departments and services were headed by Cols N. G. Belov (chief of staff), A. S. Kirillov (chief of rear services), senior battalion commissar V. I. Vikhrov (chief of the political department), Eng 1st Rank V. I. Rebrov (chief engineer), Lt Col A. P. Naumov (chief of operations department), Majs A. S. Chernyy (chief of the reconnaissance department), Ye. I. Matov (chief of the communications department) and F. S. Mukhin (chief navigator). However, by the start of combat the staff and services of the army as yet were not fully manned and did not have sufficient coordination.

Simultaneously with the arrival of the combat formations of the 16th AA, its rear services were also organized. A certain number of rear units was assigned from the 8th AA. They already had experience in servicing aviation under combat conditions. However the organizing of the rear services was

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drawn out, since the other rear units could not promptly reach the location of the army due to the enormous overloading of the lines of communications. For this reason the flight units for an extended time were served by the rear organizations of the 8th AA. This led to inconveniences and interruptions in supplying the units and impeded the carrying out of combat.

By 4 September, the rear services of the 16th AA had 3 regional air bases (the 23d, 35th and 80th RAB), 2 motor transport battalions, 3 head air depots, an army ammunition depot, 2 airfield engineer battalions and 17 airfield service battalions (bao). In addition, the 78th RAB was also assigned to the rear services of the army, but this RAB was not fully manned and did not have experience in servicing air units. The rear services of the army had 87 percent of the established motor transport, 67 percent of the special motor transport and 41 percent of the tractors. As a whole, the rear services of the AA were not yet organized, and with the start of combat many difficulties arose in its work.

In becoming part of the Stalingrad Front, the 16th AA immediately began to be involved in carrying out a series of combat missions such as conducting air reconnaissance, providing cover for the troops on the battlefield and the crossings over the Volga, and making assault attacks against the advancing fascist troops.

However, the AA at that time was still unable to operate at full strength. The air divisions were undermanned and were short of aircraft. For example, the 228th shad, by the beginning of September, had only 33 percent of the established aircraft. The personnel coming from the training and reserve regiments did not possess combat experience; the units maintained poor contact with one another and with the army staff and the troops of the front, and their coordination was not worked out. Nevertheless the army air regiments carried out the missions set for them. The pilots upon arriving at the new location soon engaged in combat making several combat sorties per day with the absence of the minimally necessary maintenance facilities and specialists. After the sortie they helped the technicians ready aircraft for the next one and often themselves repaired the damaged equipment.

But under these difficult conditions the pilots showed examples of courage and wholehearted service to the motherland.

On 12 August, the 688th shap received the mission of attacking the airfield at Oblivskaya where up to 100 fascist aircraft were based. The regimental commander soon after takeoff returned to the base due to a malfunction of the motor, and command was assumed by the regimental navigator, senior political leader M. G. Sklyarov. The attack on the enemy airfield was brilliantly executed by the regiment under Sklyarov's leadership. Around 50 enemy aircraft were destroyed. The assault group returned without losses.

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On 17 August, the assault planes of the 688th shap made a powerful strike against a concentration of enemy tanks in the region of Abganerovo. Several score destroyed and damaged tanks remained on the battlefield. A significant portion of them had been destroyed by the flyers from the squadron of Sr Lt A. I. Kadomets.

On 22 August, a group of assault planes from the same regiment under the command of Lt I. S. Bogachev was carrying out a mission to destroy the crossings over the Don at the population point of Nizhniy Akatov. In the region of the target the assault planes were attacked by enemy fighters. Bogachev's aircraft caught fire in the air. Preferring death to capture, Lt Ivan Bogachev repeated the feat of Capt Gastello, and in the burning aircraft he crashed into the crossing and destroyed it. The pilot hero was killed but the mission was carried out.

On the following day, Capt I. P. Motornyy, in leading a group of six "Yaks" of the 512th iap, in the region of Vertyachiy Farm encountered more than 60 enemy aircraft and, regardless of the numerical superiority, boldly engaged them in combat and shot down two enemy fighters.

In the course of organizing the 16th AA, the political bodies carried out enormous work with the new recruits. The officers of the army political department visited the flight and rear units where they helped in eliminating the shortcomings and explained the missions of the men in the forthcoming operations and the requirements of the Order of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief No 227. Seminars were held with the leadership of the regiments and divisions on the following subjects: "The Defense of the Fatherland--A Sacred Duty to the Motherland," "Not a Step Backwards," "Discipline of the Red Army," "The Feat of the 28 Guards Panfilov Troops," and others. In the units there were meetings of the party and Komsomol aktiv at which commanders and political workers spoke on the course of combat and the forthcoming missions, as well as party and Komsomol meetings where they discussed the question of the vanguard role of the communist and Komsomol in combat. The political work was carried out with particular effectiveness in the 288th shad and the 220th iad where F. P. Pankin and Toporov were the chiefs of the political departments.

The party organizations of the AA in September 1942 numbered 2,010 members of the VKP(b), 1,365 candidate members of the VKP(b), and 4,192 Komsomol members.<sup>1</sup>

The political workers actively aided the commanders in organizing combat and they themselves participated in the combat sorties, setting a personal example of courage and heroism. The mass meetings at the airfields before taking off for a mission became a good tradition in the air units.

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<sup>1</sup> Arkhiv MO SSSR [Archives of the USSR Ministry of Defense], folio 368, inv. [inventory] 6512, file 25, sheets 4, 7.

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The communists and Komsomol members led the remaining personnel. With the slogan "Not a Step Backwards!" the pilots engaged the fascist barbarians in combat. The navigator of the 694th shap, Sr Lt M. I. Bobrov, stated at a meeting: "I will carry out the combat missions assigned to me no matter what the cost! If I must die, my death will cost the fascists dearly." The navigator of the 783d shap, Sr Lt B. Ye. Greben'kov, declared: "I will honorably carry out the combat mission and will blaze the trail for the ground forces." At this same meeting, the technicians vowed to prepare the aircraft so that they would operate reliably. The pilots of the 783d shap, the 581st iap and other regiments vowed that they would give all their ability and would spare neither forces or their life to defend the city on the Volga along with the ground forces.

Simultaneously with the carrying out of combat, the flight personnel mastered the aircraft equipment, they improved their tactical training, and studied the region of operations and the combat experience of the best crews and subunits. Range exercises were carried out in the units of assault aviation. The pilots improved their dive bombing skills. In the air regiments a competition developed for the title of sniper crews. In the fighter air divisions, the elements of aerial combat and gunnery training were worked out.

Along with this the air units carried out extensive work to train young pilots for combat. When the first group arrived from the schools and reserve regiments in the 512th iap, the commander of the AA demanded that particular attention be given to their training and grounded the unprepared pilots. The regimental commander, Hero of the Soviet Union Lt Col N. S. Gerasimov and the regimental military commissar, battalion commissar I. M. Mamykin, spoke with each pilot. Then they familiarized them with the situation on the front and with the nature of the missions to be carried out by the regiment. The question of permitting the young pilots to fly was discussed at a party meeting of the regiment. The experienced communist pilots and the former instructors of the flight schools I. P. Motornyy, Z. V. Semenyuk and V. N. Makarov were instructed to conduct exercises and talks with the new recruits and to ready the young pilots for combat. Just several days were given for training, but it provided the needed effect. In time the young pilots became outstanding masters of air combat.

In the Defensive Engagement at Stalingrad

During the last 10 days of August and in the beginning of September 1942, the situation of our troops in the interfluvium of the Don and the Volga became very crucial. The enemy was driving toward the Volga.

"Regardless of the measures taken to reinforce the aviation in the Stalingrad sector, the situation in the air remained extremely strained," recalled Mar Avn S. I. Rudenko in his book "Dvesti Ognennykh Dney" [200 Fiery Days]. "Enemy bombers were making strong attacks against our troops and rear installations. Probably the blackest deed of the Nazi invaders in the battle for Stalingrad was the barbarian destruction of the city. For this virtually

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the entire 4th German Air Force was used. In just 1 day, on 23 August, around 2,000 aircraft participated in the raids on the city. The air shook from the continuous thunder of exploding bombs. The pilots of the 102d Air Defense iad and the fighters of the front fought heroically against the enemy aviation. In 25 dogfights they shot down 90 fascist aircraft."

The situation of our troops to the southwest of Stalingrad also deteriorated. On 3 September Headquarters demanded that the forces of the left wing of the Stalingrad front immediately make counterstrikes against the enemy which was bashing toward the Volga. The 16th AA was given the mission of supporting the troops of the front, in destroying enemy personnel, tanks and artillery on the battlefront and in the concentration areas, as well as covering the troops and crossings against air attack and the conducting of reconnaissance. The staff of the AA worked out an operational plan.

The combat of the AA started on 4 September with the forces of the most battleworthy units at that time, the 228th shad and the 220th iad. The remaining air formations and units were committed to battle later (the 291st shad on the following day, the 283d iad on 8 September and the regiments of nighttime planes on 10-12 September).

The basic strike on 4 September was made by the assault planes against enemy personnel and military equipment in the regions of Voroponovo, Kuz'michi and the Experimental Station Sovkhoz. Here particularly distinguishing themselves were the groups led by the commanders of the 688th and 783d shap, Majs V. I. Yarov and N. N. Chikhalenko. The assault planes were covered by fighters of the 220th iad. As a total during the day, the AA units executed 127 sorties, they conducted 13 dogfights, and shot down 12 enemy aircraft. The aviation succeeded in destroying and knocking out 30 tanks and 40 motor vehicles.

In the following days, the AA, in aiding the troops of the front, made assault attacks against enemy personnel and tanks concentrated to the northwest of Stalingrad in the regions of Kuz'michi, Drevniy Val and Konnyy Siding.

During the period of 5-8 September, the pilots of the AA made 688 sorties, of which over half were to destroy enemy personnel and equipment, 21 dogfights were engaged in and 21 enemy aircraft were shot down. The pilots of the 283d iad on 8 September began to provide cover for the troops of the front, the airfields, the rear installations and the town of Kamyshin.

The battles during these difficult days were a serious testing for the just created 16th AA. The flight personnel of the army withstood this testing and demonstrated total courage and mature skill in the battles against the superior forces of enemy aviation.

The commander of the 237th iap, Maj A. B. Isayev, during just the first days of the battles shot down five enemy aircraft.



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On 7 September, seven assault planes headed by squadron commander, Capt P. S. Vinogradov attacked enemy tanks and motorized infantry on the battlefield. During the attack, the group was fired on by antiaircraft artillery and attacked by four Me-109 fighters. Vinogradov was able to quickly turn against the enemy and before the very eyes of our infantrymen shot down two enemy aircraft with strong machinegun and cannon fire. The second element of fascist fighters quickly took cover. Vinogradov was wounded, his aircraft was damaged, but he brought his group back to the airfield. For able combat and for heroism shown during this, Capt P. S. Vinogradov was awarded the Order of Lenin. By an order of the NKO he was awarded the rank of lieutenant colonel. The courageous pilot soon assumed command of the 694th shap.

On 8 September the combat activity of the AA was particularly intense. The pilots of just the 291st shad, having made 83 combat sorties, knocked out 31 tanks, 15 armored vehicles, 199 motor vehicles, 25 guns and destroyed 700 enemy soldiers. The fighters of the 220th and 283d iad carried out 6 dogfights and shot down 8 enemy aircraft.

On that day the young pilot B. M. Gomolko carried out an unprecedented feat. A group of 10 fighters headed by the commander of the 520th iap, Maj S. N. Chirva, in flying to a forward airfield, unexpectedly encountered 10 enemy He-111 bombers. Regardless of the fact that the young pilots had never encountered the enemy, Maj Chirva, in having confidence in his charges, decided to attack the enemy. Sr Sgt Gomolko boldly dove into the formation of enemy aircraft and shot down one bomber. Having expended his ammunition in the subsequent attacks, and being wounded, the pilot decided to ram a bomber. With the propeller of his aircraft he cut off the tail assembly of a second bomber, after which he lost control of the fighter and bailed out. In parachuting, Gomolko prepared to fight the fascist pilots who also were bailing out. One he shot in an attempt to resist, and the other he captured and took to the staff of his air regiment. Soon thereafter Sr Sgt B. M. Gomolko received the rank of lieutenant for bravery and was awarded the Order of Lenin. In this same battle, Maj S. N. Chirva, Lt N. V. Kharitonov and Sgt V. P. Vusikov each shot down one bomber.

On 9 September, an aerial ramming was also executed by the squadron commander of the 563d iap, a member of the party commission of the AA, battalion commissar A. V. Aborin. In a two-plane element with Lt V. A. Oreshin, he was covering the troops in the region of Yerzovki when they were attacked by six Me-109. In the dogfight Aborin and Oreshin shot down one Messerschmitt, but the engagement continued. Having used up the ammunition, the battalion commissar Aborin rammed and destroyed a second German fighter. In his damaged aircraft Aborin safely landed at his airfield.

On 10-12 September, the pilots of the AA continued to attack the enemy in the regions of elevations 139.7, 145.5, 137.2, Borodkin Farm and Sukhaya Mechetka Embankment. In endeavoring to reduce its losses, the army command began to use large groups of assault planes under a strong fighter cover. During the 3 days 608 combat sorties were made to destroy the enemy troops. During these days the groups under the command of M. G. Sklyarov, G. I. Kopayev, P. P. Pospelov, N. I. Lunev and I. F. Bibishev (the 228th shad),

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as well as A. G. Nakonechnikov, A. A. Kurnikov and S. I. Vinnik (291st shap) fought well. The assault planes 86 tanks, 186 motor vehicles, 20 guns and mortars and much other military equipment. The fighter pilots conducted 23 dogfights and shot down 15 enemy aircraft.

On 10 September, in carrying out a mission, the aircraft of the pilot of the 245th shap, Jr Lt Kleshchev, was hit by enemy antiaircraft fire. The Nazis paid dearly for the life of the Soviet pilot. The courageous assault pilot, repeating the feat of Capt Gastello, in his burning aircraft dove into a column of enemy motor vehicles.

In aiding the troops in repelling the enemy tank attacks, on 11 September a group of assault pilots from the 243d shap headed by the squadron commander Hero of the Soviet Union, Sr Lt N. M. Karabulin, distinguished itself. In the region of Plodovitoye, this group made a divebombing attack on a concentration of fascist tanks. The pilots set several tanks and armored vehicles on fire, they created panic in the enemy ranks and thwarted the enemy attack.

The fighters of the 220th and 283d iad on 12 September alone in 10 dogfights show down 9 enemy aircraft. Capt P. N. Kuznetsov (the 283d iad) particularly distinguished himself, and he, in mastering the Yak-1 fighter, destroyed two fascist Me-109 aircraft in one dogfight.

In the course of the combat activities of the AA, the command and flight personnel discovered many tactical errors. The enemy pilots, the tactics of whom was based on surprise and a constant desire to achieve numerical superiority in aerial combat, used the fact that our fighters often appeared over the battlefield in smaller numbers and made mistakes in conducting combat. The favorite method of the fascist fighters was to attack our single aircraft which had become separated from a group as a result of the failure of the pilot to observe the flight formations or an equipment malfunction. The Nazis endeavored to cut individual aircraft out of the group and then fire on them.

The tactics of the enemy fighters was carefully studied by the pilots of the AA. New methods of aerial combat were sought out against the enemy tricks. In order to facilitate the locating of enemy aircraft and increase the possibility of maneuvering in a dogfight, our fighters soon gave up the close flight formations and shifted over to a more fluid system of two-aircraft elements. An element of two aircraft became the basic formation for all the fighter combat groups.

The commander of the 220th iad, Col A. V. Utin, and the flight personnel of this division became fervent followers and propagandists for the new tactics. In the units in the flight analyses and later in training dogfights, the pilots constantly worked for the art of conducting group and single combat in two-aircraft elements with the extensive use of vertical maneuvers.

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At the same time measures were taken to improve the flight performance of the fighters which did not reach the designed speed due to a number of flaws. In particular, upon recommendations proposed by the AA pilots, the Yak-1 aircraft, with the aid of workers from the Saratov Aviation Plant was made 11 percent lighter, the skin was reinforced on it, and the covering improved. As a result the aircraft began to execute a vertical maneuver better than the Messerschmitt. Gen S. I. Rudenko visited the plant and saw to it that the workers and designers carried out the requests of the crews.

In combating enemy aviation, an enormous role was played by the radio network for guiding the fighters from the ground and which was organized in the 16th AA. Here they used the experience of the defenders of Leningrad. The guidance network of the AA included a central radio station which was located in the area of the army command post, airfield radios of the air divisions and regiments, as well as the guidance radios located along the front line and in contact with the airborne fighters. The guidance radios informed the airborne pilots of the air situation, they guided them to the enemy aircraft, they summoned the fighters from the airfields and directed them to the necessary targets.

For strengthening the counteractions against enemy fighters, the commander of the AA demanded that in each iad "hunter" groups be organized consisting of 8-10 of the most experienced pilots, and they were given the mission of destroying enemy aircraft in the air by the "hunting" method.

In September 1942, the situation at Stalingrad remained very complicated. The enemy aviation still had air superiority. However, this did not reduce the combat enthusiasm of our pilots.

The 434th Separate iap (commander, Hero of the Soviet Union, Maj I. I. Kleshchev, military commissar, battalion commissar Stel'mashchuk) fought particularly successfully. From June through August 1942, the pilots of the regiment near Stalingrad destroyed 90 enemy aircraft. In the middle of September, the regiment, having received Yak-7 and Yak-9 aircraft, again was rebased to Stalingrad and became part of the 16th AA. The pilots of the regiment always excelled in high flight training, combat mastery, maximum bravery and a constant desire for combat. Many pilots had downed enemy aircraft to their score. Just during the period of the Battle of Stalingrad, in the regiment Maj V. P. Babkov (now Lt Gen Avn and honored military pilot of the USSR), Capt A. Ya. Baklan and Sr Lts V. Ya. Alkidov and N. A. Karnachenok became Heroes of the Soviet Union. A majority of the pilots in the regiment received high governmental decorations.

Here is how the combat of the pilots in the 434th iap was described by Hero of the Soviet Union, Lt Gen Avn. A. F. Semenov, an immediate participant in these events.

The fascist aviation in September was operating actively against the battle formations of our troops, against the crossings over the Volga and the lines of communications on the left bank. The 434th iap was to counter this in every possible way.

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The first combat sortie of three flights of the regiment on 16 September was headed by the communist, the regimental commander Maj I. I. Kleshchev. In approaching the combat area, up to 30 Junkers and several elements of Messerschmitts were encountered. Kleshchev first with the entire force made a surprise attack on the bombers, and then, having divided into two groups, our fighters engaged the Messerschmitts and the Junkers. In the first attack, Maj Kleshchev and Lt S. F. Dolgushin succeeded in each shooting down a bomber. Then the regimental commander and Capt I. A. Yakimov set two other fascist fighters on fire.

On the same day pilots from this regiment participated in several other dogfights. Fighting particularly well were Maj V. P. Babkov, Sr Lt M. A. Garam (soon thereafter he became a Hero of the Soviet Union) and Lt S. P. Komandenko, each of whom increased his combat score.

On 17 September, three flights under the command of Capt I. I. Izbinskiy took off to provide cover to our troops. Having encountered a large group of Ju-87 aircraft, they immediately attacked them, and Izbinskiy and Karnachenok each shot down one bomber. Then two other Messerschmitts were destroyed and they were shot down by Sr Lt F. F. Prokopenko and Lt S. F. Dolgushin. At the end of the dogfight, the German fighters succeeded in shooting down one Yak which was piloted by the courageous woman pilot, Lt K. Nechayev.

As a total on this day, the regiment carried out 65 sorties and destroyed seven enemy aircraft. On the following days, the pilots of the 434th Regiment also carried out a number of heroic feats.

As the combat operations of the 16th AA grew broader, its material and technical support became more complex. Certain rear units had not yet arrived, and the question had not been settled of transferring a number of rear bodies from the 8th AA. Moreover, materiel was basically delivered by motor transport through Kamyshin, and this required a great deal of time and equipment. All of this created an overloading and even interruptions in the supplying of the units, and at times necessitated the resorting to extreme measures, including the delivery, for example, of rockets directly from the center on air transports.

Under these complicated conditions, the command and political bodies had to give a great deal of attention to the operation of the aviation rear services. It was essential to organize precise operations of the RAB and bao, the repair shops, the airfield engineer battalions, and organize the delivery of ammunition and fuel, the repair of the aircraft and the supplying of the crews with food. The location of the air regiments was partially altered for the purpose of a more even load on the rear bodies, clear communications were organized between the staff of the AA and the rear units, and constant information was provided for the leadership of the rear services on the required support for combat.

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Party political work was intensified in the rear units. It was based upon indoctrinating in the flight personnel of the maintenance units a high discipline and feeling of Soviet patriotism, and a readiness without regard to time or even life to carry out any mission given by the command. The Order of the NKO No 227 was given to each fighter. Meetings and assemblies were held at which they propagandized the combat feats of the flight personnel and explained that the heroic work of the rear services was the guarantee for combat successes on the front. The effective work of the political bodies produced results, having caused an even greater patriotic upsurge among the soldiers and officers.

In the 357th bap, the Red Armyman, the candidate party member V. I. Zaytsev worked continuously for 9 days in unloading bombs from a barge. Sgts. A. N. Burko and F. S. Maydanovich during an enemy air raid on Rakovka Station saw that cars with flour had been set afire from the explosion of bombs. In risking their lives, the men set to unloading the cars. Persons nearby hurried to help. The brave people rolled the burning cars away from a nearby ammunition dump and thereby prevented an explosion. The lieutenants of the 123d Motor Transport Battalion, A. Ya. Dynnik, was mortally wounded while delivering aviation fuel. The driver of the vehicle Pvt Stadchanko was also wounded, but he did not abandon the vehicle and delivered the fuel on time.

Under the conditions of the intense and very fluid combat, when the situation on the front changed frequently, air reconnaissance assumed great significance. The air scouts had to detect the movement of enemy troops along the roads before the front, discover troop concentration areas, follow the enemy maneuvers on the battlefield and observe the grouping of enemy aviation.

Permanent crews from the 283d iad and the 228th shad were assigned for conducting daytime air reconnaissance. Nighttime reconnaissance was carried out by the 970th lbap. Personnel from the 325th orae [detached reconnaissance air squadron] and the 40th Detached Long-Range Reconnaissance Air Regiment [odrap of the SHC] were responsible for operational air reconnaissance and aerial photography of enemy defensive installations. The crews assigned for air reconnaissance, as a rule, had great combat experience as well as good tactical and flight training. The pilots Capt A. A. Yefremov, Sr Lts P. N. Nezolya and V. I. Shuin, and Jr Lt G. D. Tokarev became the best scouts in the 283d iad, and pilots Z. V. Zemenyuk, I. F. Balyuk, Ya. D. Mikhaylik, V. A. Limarenko and others in the 220th iad.

As a result of the intense combat of the troops and aviation of the Stalingrad and Southeastern fronts, during the first half of September, the enemy's attempts to break through to Stalingrad without halting were repelled. But the Nazis did not abandon their plans. They were still strong and confident of their victory.

On 13 September, the 6th German Army began to storm the city, and this was supported by hundreds of enemy aircraft from the air.

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The troops of the Southeastern Front were involved in difficult battles and stopped the enemy drive with difficulty.

The formations and units of the 16th AA night and day attacked the grouping of Nazi troops in the region of Malaya and Bol'shaya Rossoshka, Akatovka, Kuz'michi, Konnyy Siding and Rynok. The fighters fought the enemy aviation, and provided cover for the troops on the battlefield and for their airfields. From 13 through 16 September, the units of the AA made 405 sorties, including one-half for attacking enemy troops. Some 21 enemy aircraft were shot down in dogfights.

In order to weaken the enemy drive on Stalingrad, the command of the Stalingrad Front decided on 19 September to make a counterthrust in the direction of Gumrak and Gorodishche using forces of troops from the left wing of the front.

The 16th AA was to destroy the enemy weapons in front of the First Guards Army, to cover the grouping of its own troops, to neutralize enemy aviation at its airfields and assist the troops making the counterstrike. For supporting the troops, 118 fighters, 84 assault planes and 21 bombers were used, and these were to carry out 650 sorties.

On 17 September, the fighters of the AA provided cover for the troops and conducted reconnaissance along the front of the First Guards Army, and also flew out to intercept enemy aircraft. As a total during the day they made 180 sorties and in dogfights destroyed 15 enemy aircraft, having lost 7 Yak-1. The assault divisions readied the equipment. During the night the crews of the 970th IbaP neutralized the enemy aviation at the airfields of Tuzov, Surovikino, Zryazhskiy and Oblivskaya.

At dawn of 18 September, units of the AA attacked the airfields of Peskovatka and Gumrak and the enemy communications junctions, and then provided air cover for the battle formations of the troops of the First Guards and 24th armies, they destroyed enemy personnel and equipment in the regions of the Experimental Station Sovkhoz, Konnyy Siding, Bol'shaya Rossoshka and Podsobnoye Khozyaystvo [Auxiliary Farm], and also conducted air reconnaissance and flew out to intercept fascist aircraft.

As a total on 18 September, 363 sorties were made. The crews of the air army during the day knocked out 15 tanks, 109 motor vehicles, 21 artillery pieces, they suppressed the fire of 3 batteries, and scattered and destroyed several hundred Nazis. In dogfights 26 enemy aircraft were shot down and 2 were damaged. For us a total of 32 aircraft did not return from the mission; many of them made forced landings off of airfields.

On that day the pilots of the 688th shap fought skillfully and unstintingly. They received the very complex mission of setting a smokescreen ahead of our troops on open terrain. For this the group of assault planes had to execute a dive directly ahead of the enemy troops in a zone of fierce small-arms, machinegun and antiaircraft fire. The regimental commander, communist

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Maj K. V. Yarovoy, called for volunteers for this flight and himself led the group of assault planes. The mission was carried out. The smoke-screen helped the troops go over to the offensive and squeeze the fascists. However, the airplane of Maj Yarovoy was hit and fell on enemy territory.

Groups of assault planes from the 694th and 783d shap under the cover of fighters from the 220th iad destroyed the tanks and motorized infantry in the region of the Experimental Station Sovkhoz and Konnyy Siding. On the first run, the "Ils" released rockets and then pursued the attack with machinegun and cannon fire. In the second run the crews flew in a circle and for 20 minutes attacked targets, in divebombing and firing on the enemy from cannons and machineguns. This combat was observed by the Headquarters representative, Gen Arm G. K. Zhukov, who expressed gratitude to the crews for excellent operations over the target. In the battle the pilots of the 694th shap, Sr Lts M. I. Bobrov, I. A. Kovalev and B. Ye. Greben'kov from the 783 shap, particularly distinguished themselves. The pilots of the 954th shap, Capt A. I. Bazuyev and Sgt A. S. Cherezov, dropped bombs and released the rockets precisely on target.

In supporting the ground forces, successful actions were carried out by the groups of assault planes from the 243d and 313th shap under the command of Sr Lts Hero of the Soviet Union N. M. Karabulin and S. I. Vinnik, escorted by pilots of the 283d iad.

In the region of the target, they encountered enemy fighters. A dogfight broke out. While the Soviet fighters drove off the attacks of the numerically superior enemy, the assault planes destroyed the fascist artillery and tanks in the region of the population point of Novaya Nadezhda, in blazing the trail for our infantry and mechanized units. During the attack on the target, the pilot N. G. Nikonov was wounded in the arm and leg and his aircraft was struck. Nikonov, showing tenacity and courage, did not leave the formation, he carried out all the attacks, he brought the aircraft back to his airfield and landed safely. On 19 September, the pilot of the 954th shap, Sr Sgt A. F. Timkov, behaved just as courageously.

But not only victories accompanied our pilots in the combat. There were also defeats. Thus, on 18 September, a group of six IIs from the 245th shap being covered by five Yak-1 from the 283d iad, in approaching the target, met up with five Me-109. Three of our fighters engaged them in combat, and two remained to cover the group of assault planes. At this time two other groups of Messerschmitts appeared. They cut off the element of cover fighters from our assault planes and as a result of continuous attacks shown down two Il-2 aircraft. The remaining four crews on greatly damaged aircraft crossed the front line with difficulty. The reason for the failure was that the fighters, in engaging the groups of enemy aircraft in combat, scattered their forces. Also the numerical superiority of the enemy in this combat was felt.

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In the September battles, a number of other essential shortcomings was discovered in the organization of combat activities. The young flight personnel which arrived from the reserve regiments and schools was not sufficiently prepared for aerial combat. Thus, in the 220th iad, two-thirds of the young pilots had little experience in flying in elements and groups, and were careless in combat. At times pilots who had little knowledge of the area of operations engaged in combat, without a testing of their piloting techniques. The fighters which flew out to cover the troops were not always echeloned in altitude, they were not divided into holding and assault groups, and in encountering enemy aircraft, all the fighters engaged a portion of the enemy forces and overlooked the remainder.

The assault pilots also made mistakes. The extended flying formations made it difficult for the fighters to cover them and facilitated the actions of the enemy pilots. Routine in selecting the route and pass at the target made it easy for the enemy to organize air defense. It was also a mistake to leave the target one by one, without observing the flight formation. Frequently because of the lack of forces, for escorting the assault planes, fire groups were made up from different air regiments. Here the effectiveness of escorting, as a rule, was lower than in escorting by a group which was numerically smaller, but assigned from one air unit.

A careful analysis of the detected shortcomings on the staffs and a critical review of them in the flight units of the army enriched the combat experience of the aviators, they aided in working out new tactical procedures, they encouraged the creative thought of the commanders and forced the abandoning of routine in the combat methods.

On 18-19 September, in supporting the combat of the first Guards and 24th armies, the 16th AA was unable to completely carry out the given missions. Here the lack of forces and the poor training of the young flight personnel which had no experience in fighting enemy aviation could be felt.

Along with this, the experienced pilots of the 434th iap in this difficult situation continued to strike the enemy. On 18 September, the regiment with 30 aircraft made 73 sorties and destroyed 19 enemy aircraft in dogfights.

The pilots of the 563d iap also fought successfully. A flight consisting of the regimental commander Maj V. I. Nenashev, the regimental navigator Maj A. A. Strakhov and Sr Lt A. A. Tkachenko shot down four enemy aircraft in dogfights.

However, the victories were won at a dear price. Thus, on 18 September the 434th iap lost several of its comrades, including Sr Lt V. A. Mikoyan. In one of the dogfights, the outstanding pilot, the commander of the 237th iap, Maj A. B. Isayev, was wounded and grounded.



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On 19 September, two fighter pilots from the AA, loyal to their military duty, in endeavoring to achieve the decisive destruction of the enemy, carried out air ramming. This was how it was.

Six Yak-1 aircraft from the 283d iad, in covering their troops, engaged a numerically superior group of German Me-109 fighters in combat. In the course of the battle, the pilot V. N. Chenskiy, having used up his ammunition, rammed a German aircraft. With his left wing he struck one of the fascist fighters and he himself bailed out. This daring attack by the Soviet pilot stunned the enemy and the Nazis withdrew from battle. Pilot Chenskiy landed safely on our territory and returned to his unit.

A group of pilots from the 291st iap, in carrying out the mission of providing cover for their troops, engaged enemy fighters in combat. In this combat, the regimental military commissar, battalion commissar, L. I. Binov, destroyed one Me-110 by firing his weapons, and a second by ramming, after which he landed the damaged aircraft safely on our territory. Maj L. I. Binov, as the commander of the 512th iap, was killed in a dogfight on 13 January 1943.

On 19 September, the AA continued to provide air cover and support the troops fighting against the enemy on the approaches to Stalingrad, in attacking enemy personnel, tanks and artillery in the regions of the Experimental Station, the Experimental Field Sovkhoz and Konnyy Siding. As a total 230 sorties were made, 30 enemy aircraft were shot down in 15 dogfights, including 15 by pilots of the 434th iap which lost one Yak-7. On the ground on this day a good deal of enemy military equipment was destroyed.

The air operations somewhat eased the situation of our troops but the fierce battles around the walls of Stalingrad did not lessen. The air units and formations of the AA during these days were under great stress. The units carried out two-three sorties per day, and individual pilots made four-five sorties under the conditions of fierce resistance from the enemy fighter aviation and antiaircraft artillery.

In order to successfully cross the curtain of enemy fighters and air defense weapons as well as to effect enemy troops from the air for an extended time, the assault planes made mainly escheloned strikes in groups of six-eight aircraft. The IIs approached the targets at altitudes of 1,100-900 meters. The attack on the target was carried out by diving upon a signal from the leader or independently, depending upon the nature of the target and its size. Initially the target was fired on with rockets with subsequent bombing with single bombs or bombs in series. From a height of around 400 meters, the crews opened machinegun and cannon fire calculating to pull out of the dive at an altitude of 50 meters. Then the assault planes made a second pass for attacking the target, forming a closed circle and thus continuing to attack the target for 18-20 minutes.

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As a rule, the fighters escorted the assault planes to the target and back. It became a practice to have the preliminary appearance (10-20 minutes ahead of time) of a group of four-six fighters in the area of the forthcoming operations of the assault planes for the purpose of "clearing" the air of enemy aircraft and thereby support the assault planes.

In the last 10 days of September, our aviation as before had to operate in an extremely difficult situation. The Nazis were frantically driving toward the Volga and their aviation was still superior in the air. Fierce dogfights occurred over Stalingrad. The sorties of our pilots followed one after the other. Each sortie, as a rule, involved a dogfight. The losses in pilots and aircraft were high on both sides. In line with this several of our air regiments received new personnel.

What tension and courage were required from our pilots during these unforgettable days can be judged from the results of several dogfights conducted by the fighters of just the 434th iap.

On 20 September, seven Yaks headed by Hero of the Soviet Union, Maj V. P. Babkov, attacked a group of enemy bombers and destroyed four aircraft. Of these two were shot down by Maj Babkov and one each by Sr Lts F. F. Prokopenko and V. A. Lutskiy (now Maj Gen Avn and Hero of the Soviet Union).

On 21 September, a group of 12 fighters under the command of Capt A. I. Yakimov encountered 15 Ju-87 under the cover of 10 Me-109. Our pilots decisively attacked the enemy, and it lost seven aircraft which were destroyed by the pilots A. I. Yakimov, S. F. Dolgushin, A. Ya. Baklan, A. D. Aniskin and V. I. Garanin.

On 22 September, six fighters headed by Capt I. I. Izbinskiy intercepted German bombers on the approach to the front line and forced them to drop their bombs on German troops. In a heated engagement, the enemy lost three aircraft. They were shut down by pilots N. A. Karnachenok, M. A. Garam and A. P. Shishkin. On that day Lt N. A. Karnachenok was killed. To his score were 349 combat sorties and more than 10 enemy aircraft shot down. The courageous ace was posthumously awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

On 23 September, two flights of Yaks under the command of Capt I. F. Starodub engaged 18 enemy bombers and 12 fighters. The battle was fierce. Five German aircraft were shot down by the pilots V. A. Lutskiy, S. P. Komandenko, A. G. Kotov and I. F. Starodub. Having shot down a Messerschmitt and used up all his ammunition, Capt Starodub rammed a Junkers with his fighter. Both aircraft exploded in the air from the collision.

During these days, the enemy fighters in a dogfight set fire to the aircraft of the commander of the 434th iap, Hero of the Soviet Union Maj I. I. Kleshchev. It was impossible to put out the flames. Kleshchev bailed out and was sent to the hospital.

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Over the period from 14 September through 2 October, the pilots of the regiment carried out 611 combat sorties, they participated in 48 dog-fights, and shot down 82 German aircraft.

By the end of September, remaining in the 434th iap was only around one-third of the pilots and the combat aircraft. The personnel was excessively fatigued and the aircraft required major overhauls. And at the beginning of October, the regiment in turn was shifted to the rear for bringing up to scale and full strength.

The regiment's commander, Maj I. I. Kleshchev did not live until our victory. Late in the autumn of 1942, he perished tragically in ferrying an aircraft under difficult weather conditions.

In the course of the Battle of Stalingrad, new methods of combat use and tactical procedures of our aviation arose and were worked out. Fighter ambushes possessed a high combat effectiveness in fighting against enemy aviation. The organization of the fighter ambushes was directed personally by the commander of the AA, Gen S. I. Rudenko. In one of his orders, he prohibited the crews used in the ambush to intercept enemy fighters. Only enemy bombers and scouts were to be destroyed.

The fighter ambushes were widely used in the army, and proved fully effective in subsequent operations. The crews always endeavored to intercept the enemy aircraft from the ambush and to decisively destroying them, resorting to ramming when necessary.

Thus, on 14 September, the young pilot of the 237th iap, I. M. Chumbarev, flew out on a Yak-1 from an ambush to intercept a FW-189 reconnaissance plane which at an altitude of 1,000-1,200 meters was flying over our airfield and hiding in the clouds. With the aid of radio guidance from the ground, Chumbarev soon spotted the enemy and began to close with it. At a range of 150-200 meters the enemy gunner opened fire against Chumbarev's aircraft. Our pilot approached from behind in a blind spot, he reached the enemy aircraft, rammed it from below and knocked it down. Chumbarev was wounded in the head, but regardless of this, landed his aircraft in our territory. On 19 September Chumbarev was accepted as a candidate party member and on the same day shot down another fascist aircraft. For this he received the Order of the Red Banner and was given the rank of lieutenant.

On 27 September on the approaches to Stalingrad (the Talovki region), a German Dornier reconnaissance plane was spotted. The flight commander of the 211th iap, the Komsomol member Lt V. Ye. Pyatov, took off to intercept it from an ambush. Having used up his ammunition, with the wing of his aircraft he struck the tail assembly of the reconnaissance plane. Seeing that the Dornier was continuing to fly, the pilot made another ram and with the propeller cut off the stabilizer along with the elevator. The enemy reconnaissance plane dove toward the earth and caught fire. The hero pilot himself, having shown an example of self-sacrifice, landed safely at his airfield. For this feat the pilot V. Ye. Pyatov was awarded the Order of the Red Banner.

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In September, the acuteness of the ground and air situation demanded around-the-clock operations against the enemy. But in the AA at that time there was just the 970th night bomber air regiment (nbap) with Po-2 aircraft. This was not enough. An immediate need arose to train the crews of the assault planes for nighttime operations. Their ability to attack the enemy at night subsequently played a major role.

By the end of September, the army included the 271st night bomber air division (nbad) (commander, Col M. Kh. Morisenko, military commissar, regimental commissar V. Z. Gul'tyayev, and chief of staff, Col I. Ye. Fel'dsherov), and this had the 702d, 901st, 970th, 372d and 714th (in November, the last two were placed in the reserves) air regiments with Po-2 aircraft.

The counterstrikes by the troops of the Stalingrad and Southeastern fronts on the approaches to Stalingrad in September 1942 were of very great significance for defending the city. The fliers of the 16th and adjacent 8th AA and the air defense aviation under extremely difficult conditions of the air situation provided significant support to the troops on the battlefield, and also drove off enemy air raids on the city.

In terms of the number of dogfights and destroyed enemy aircraft, the 237th iap further distinguished itself. Its pilots carried out 44 dogfights and shot down 28 fascist aircraft. The regimental commander, the communist Maj A. B. Isayev, in making several sorties per day, served as an example of courage, valor and flying skill for the personnel. Also fighting excellently were the pilots of this regiment: Sr Lt I. F. Balyuk, Lt Kolyuchnik, Sr Sgts A. I. Denisov, N. I. Kryuchkov, V. A. Limarenko, Ya. D. Mikhaylik, A. A. Polosenko, I. M. Chumbarev, G. V. Sherstnev, and others.

Examples of dogfighting were set by the pilots of the 867th iap, the communist and flight commander Roganov and the Komsomol member, Sgt A. F. Vakula, and in the 43d iap, by Sr Lts Ch. K. Bendeliani and L. I. Borisov, and Sgt Smirnov. The favorite dogfight procedure of the pilot Ch. K. Bendeliani was a rapid frontal attack and this the German pilots avoided in every possible way.

During the first month of operations of the 16th AA, the pilots made 5,225 combat sorties, of which 992 were for bombing and strafing the enemy troops and airfields, 2,462 were for covering the troops of the front, the airfields, the town of Kamyshin and intercepting enemy aircraft, 1,356 for escorting aviation, and 358 for air reconnaissance. In the 384 dogfights carried out, the Soviet pilots shot down 290 fascist aircraft. Moreover, 6 aircraft were destroyed and damaged on the airfields, as well as around 400 tanks and armored vehicles, 1,398 motor vehicles and tank trucks, 183 guns and much other military equipment, and several thousand enemy soldiers were knocked out.

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The AA also suffered losses in the fierce battles around Stalingrad. The pilots of the 220th iad in September shot down 93 enemy aircraft but lost 91; here 48 pilots were killed and 16 wounded. The pilots of the 283d iad destroyed 105 enemy aircraft, but the battle losses were 66 aircraft (43 percent of the available) and 35 crew members (more than 30 percent). The highest losses in September were suffered by the assault pilots with one combat loss per 20 sorties.

On 1 October, the fighting strength of the 16th AA included 13 night bombers, 93 assault planes, 120 fighters and 6 reconnaissance planes, a total of 232 aircraft. In terms of the number of aircraft its fighting strength had not diminished. All the losses has been completely replaced by the heroic efforts of the Soviet people who had completed shifting all the national economic sectors to supporting the needs of the front.

As of 28 September, by a directive from Headquarters, the Stalingrad Front was reorganized and began to be called the Don Front, and the Southeastern Front became the Stalingrad Front. Lt Gen K. K. Rokossovskiy was appointed the commander of the Don Front.

In October 1942, the 16th AA supported the particular operations and counter-strikes of the combined arms armies. It was essential to wear down the enemy and distract its forces from the main sectors. One such particular operation under the code name of "Don" was carried out by an assault group of the Don Front in the middle of October. In this operation the AA carried out the following missions: It combated enemy aviation, it destroyed enemy troops ahead of the front, it aided the troops of the 24th and 66th armies in piercing the enemy defenses, it carried out air reconnaissance and destroyed the crossings over the Don.

The successful combating of enemy aviation can be seen from the dogfights of 16 October, when the fighters of just the 220th iad shot down nine and hit four fascist aircraft. The victors of these engagements were the communists and Komsomol members Lt V. I. Ivanov (he shot down two Me-109), Sgt Logachev, the battalion commissar I. M. Mamykin, Capts I. P. Motornyy and Z. V. Semenyuk, Sr Lts V. N. Makarov and P. P. Ratnikov, and Jr Lts Martynov and B. M. Rivkin.

The 271st nbad during two nights (17 and 18 October) by bombing strikes destroyed enemy personnel and equipment ahead of the front of the 24th and 66th armies, as well as enemy aircraft at the airfield of Bol'shaya Rossoshka.

During the day operations against enemy troops were carried out by assault planes from the 228th and 291st shad under the cover of fighters from the 220th and 283d iad. By concentrated strikes the assault planes aided the piercing of the enemy defenses. In subsequent sorties they prevented the enemy from bringing up reserves from deep within the defenses. Here the group of assault planes headed by the commander of the 243d shap, Maj A. G. Nakonechnikov, fought very successfully. It attacked the artillery in positions in the area of the Experimental Field Sovkhoz and Drevniy Val Siding. The assault planes knocked out four batteries and a large number of soldiers.

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During the day of 20 October, a group of six Yal-1 from the 520th iap, under the command of Maj D. I. Rodin, in covering troops in the region of Balka Konnaya, encountered at an altitude of 2,000 meters, three groups of six-eight bombers in each under the cover of four Me-109. Lt N. V. Kharitonov in an element with Sgt V. S. Ziberov attacked four Messerschmitts, and four Yaks attacked the first group of Ju-87. The enemy bombers dove and headed southwest. Two Me-109 followed them. During this time the group of Ju-88 was preparing for bombing. Rodin's element attacked and shot down the leader of this group. Capt A. A. Yefremov in the element with Sgt M. M. Reznikov attacked the second Ju-88 and shot it down. The plans of the enemy to bomb our troops were thwarted.

On that day the fighters of the 512th iap headed by squadron commander Sr Lt. P. P. Ratnikov fought heroically. A group of Yaks engaged 12 Messerschmitts in combat in the region of Razgulyayevka. As a result our fighters shot down six enemy aircraft and had no losses themselves. Victories were won by the pilots Capt Z. V. Semenyuk, Sr Lts V. I. Ivanov, V. N. Makarov, D. G. Makeyev and G. S. Dybenko. In the 237th iap, Sr Lt I. F. Balyuk, Sr Sgts V. A. Limarenko, Ya. D. Mikhaylik, A. A. Polosenko, G. V. Sherstnev and others fought excellently. Subsequently the pilots I. F. Balyuk and Ya. D. Mikhaylik were awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. Each of them made more than 300 combat sorties and had 17-20 victories in air engagements.

On the night of 21 October, the 271st nbad with 50 aircraft destroyed enemy troop concentrations in the region of Experimental Field Sovkhoz, Sukhaya Mechetka Embankment, Orlovka and Gorodishche. The division carried out 235 sorties.

During 20 and 21 October, the pilots of the army made 624 combat sorties.

On 21 October the pilots of the 512th iap were shaken by the loss in an unequal dogfight of the regimental military commissar, the former miner of the Donets Basin, the excellent pilot, the battalion commissar I. M. Mamykin. In speaking at the funeral meeting, Capt I. P. Motornyy said:

"I have learned from the commissar how to destroy the enemy, and in the future I will attack the fascists as my commissar did."

In the resolution of the meeting, the aviators stated: "The personal example of the military commissar will serve for us as an example of how we must love our motherland, how we must protect our happiness, freedom and independence. We vow to avenge the blood-thirsty fascist bandits for our commissar."

On the same day, the commander of the 237th iap, Maj M. D. Mordvinov, was killed in a dogfight. He was replaced by Maj Ye. P. Mel'nikov.

On 23 October, the commander of the 16th AA, in observing the attacks by the assault planes on the battlefield from the command post of the 66th Army, noted the bold actions of the group of pilots from the 694th shap headed by Capt G. P. Kostandi. The assault planes were attacking targets

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in the region of Konnyy Siding, the Experimental Field Sovkhoz and Sukhaya Machetka Embankment, and destroyed 7 tanks and 10 motor vehicles. Of the pilots in the group, Sr Lt F. I. Smetankin particularly distinguished himself. The group merited the gratitude of the commander of the 66th Army, Lt Gen A. S. Zhadov.

On 22 and 23 October, difficult weather conditions limited air operations. The night aviation made a total of 77 sorties, attacking enemy troops in the region of the Experimental Field Sovkhoz where a food depot was destroyed and which was very essential for the Nazis even at that time. During the day the aviation carried out 132 sorties over the 2 days to provide cover and support for the troops.

On the night of 24 October, 19 Il-2 aircraft and 10 Po-2 aircraft neutralized enemy troops 20-30 km to the northwest of Stalingrad.

On 25-26 October, the assault planes continued operations in the same regions. Here Lt Col N. N. Chikhalenko, Sr Lts M. I. Bobrov, B. Ya. Greben'-kov, Hero of the Soviet Union N. M. Karabulin, A. I. Kadomtsev, Yu. N. Zykov, F. I. Smetankin and Lts I. F. Bibishev and N. I. Lunev distinguished themselves.

The squadron commander of the 688th shap, Anatoliy Ivanovich Kadomtsev, particularly stood out in his boldness and flying skills. He was born in 1918. As a youth he worked as a mechanic at a machine building plant in Mytishchi, and at the same time studied at an air club. Since his 20's he had been in military aviation. He completed the Engel's Flying School and remained there as an instructor pilot. He began his combat activity in November 1941 on the Kalinin Front where he proved to be an intrepid assault plane pilot. In the defense of Stalingrad 117 times he led the pilots to attack Nazi troops and airfields; the command has entrusted the most difficult missions to him. For the heroism and courage shown in the battles in Stalingrad, he was awarded the Orders of the Red Banner and the Patriotic War Second Degree. He joined the VKP(b) in 1943.

Capt A. I. Kadomtsev died heroically on 21 February 1944. His aircraft was hit by an enemy antiaircraft shell. The pilot aimed his burning Il-2 into the midst of the fascist troops. In April 1944, he was posthumously awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union, and in memory of him, the village of podkhvatilovka in Nizhnelomovskiy Rayon in Penzenskaya Oblast, where he was born, by the Ukase of the Presidium of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet was renamed the village of Kadomtsevo. During the war A. I. Kadomtsev made 280 combat sorties. To his combat score were 65 destroyed tanks, 340 motor vehicles, 16 aircraft burned up on the ground, and 4 shot down in air combat.

His comrades-in-arms Sr Lt Yu. N. Zykov and Lt I. F. Bibishev also died the death of heroes in battles for the motherland and were awarded the Gold Star and the Order of Lenin posthumously. Yu. N. Zykov received his in July 1944 (he made 175 combat sorties), and I. F. Bibishev in August 1943 (he made 141 combat sorties).

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The certain advance of our troops in the Don Operation forced the enemy to haul the offensive battles in the outskirts of Stalingrad and to shift significant forces of their aviation for fighting against the troops and aviation of the Don Front.

The formations of the 16th AA in October made 5,718 combat sorties. A large portion of them was made to bomb and strafe enemy troops.

In the 164 dogfights carried out the Soviet pilots shot down 84 enemy aircraft and destroyed 31 aircraft at airfields. Our combat losses were 61 aircraft.

The 812th iap (commander Maj Lokhin) fought well in October. In the 29 dogfights, the pilots of this regiment shot down 18 fascist aircraft. In the 283d iad, Capt A. A. Yefremov (520th iap), Sr Lt Veremeyenko (812th iap), and Jr Lt G. D. Tokarev (563d iap) particularly distinguished themselves.

In the 220th iad, Capts Z. V. Semenyuk and I. P. Motornyy, battalion commissars L. I. Binov and I. M. Mamykin, and Sr Lts L. I. Borisov, G. S. Dubenok and V. N. Makarov were rightly called the best pilots.

The October air battles showed that our pilots had gradually begun to seize the initiative from the enemy and more and more often the attacks of the Red Star fighters ended in victory. And this was natural. The moral qualities of the Soviet pilots were immeasurably higher than the fascists. Even in inferior numbers, our pilots courageously resisted the pressure of enemy aviation. The quantitative inequality in the air was compensated for by the continuously increasing art of carrying out aerial combat, by the high combat tension and by the constant search for new methods of countering enemy aviation. And finally, the new Soviet aircraft for many indicators were better than the enemy aircraft. The commander of the 283d iad, Col V. A. Kitayev, at the end of September, reported to the commander of the air army: "Our aircraft, the light Yal-1, not only is not inferior to the enemy fighters, but greatly surpasses them in altitude up to 2,500 meters both in horizontal and vertical maneuvers."

And our assault plane the Il-2 also possessed outstanding combat qualities. It could attack any targets and was little vulnerable to enemy fire. For strengthening the defense capability against attack by enemy fighters, upon the initiative of pilots from the 228th shad, on the Il-2 aircraft, the engineers and technicians from the air regiments built cockpits for air gunners and installed machine guns. At first mechanics and other air specialists flew the missions. At the beginning of November 1942, industry began to deliver two-seat Il-2 aircraft to the front. The losses of assault planes immediately began to decline noticeably.

Over the 2 months of combat activity, the aviators of the AA learned how to organize and conduct air reconnaissance, they worked out the methods



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of operations under nighttime conditions, from an ambush and from staging airfields, and they mastered air "hunting" in groups and by single crews. The flight personnel of the fighter units mastered the tactics of air combat. Control of the fighters was also improved.

The fighters were guided to the air enemy by radio from a command post where the division commander was located. He gave the command to take off in clear text and then controlled combat.

The cover for the troops of the front against the air enemy in October began to be organized considering the particular features of the air situation. The fighters covering important installations were relieved in the air.

With each passing day, the men of the AA acquired combat experience, and the skills of the flight personnel were honed. Now, after the successful operations in September and October, the command of the army and the air formations began to work for massing the air efforts and making concentrated strikes against the enemy.

The operations of 28 October can serve as an example of this, when the troops of the front liberated Kletskaya Station, an important enemy strongpoint. The enemy driven out of Kletskaya began to bring up reserves and was preparing for a counterattack. For attacking the enemy reserves the commander of the AA assigned 92 assault planes and 90 fighters from four divisions. As a result of the unexpectedly made concentrated strike against the Nazis, their plan was thwarted. The assault planes destroyed a large number of tanks, armored and transport vehicles, artillery guns and mortars. The troops of the front dug in firmly on the captured lines. On the same day the command of the combined-arms formations warmly thanked the fliers of the AA for outstanding coordination and reliable support.

As a result of the continuous improvement in tactics and the growth of the skill of our flight personnel, the fascists began to suffer significant losses, and their aviation was tangibly losing superiority in the air.

At the end of October 1942, Maj Gen Av Mikhail Makarovich Kosykh was appointed the chief of staff of the 16th AA. The son of a peasant, he was born in 1903 in Voronezhskaya Oblast. At the age of 15 he volunteered for the Red Army, and a year later joined the RKP(b). He was an active participant in the Civil War. From 1932, he continued serving in staff and command positions in the aviation. Prior to his appointment to the 16th AA, he had been the chief of staff of the air force of the Far Eastern Front. In April 1943, M. M. Kosykh was promoted to the position of deputy commander of the AA.

After the war, N. M. Kosykh in sequence was the chief of staff and the air commander of a district, the military advisor to the People's Republic of China, and the inspector general of the Air Force. At present, Lt Gen Avn M. M. Kosykh is retired.

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Operations of the Air Army During the Counteroffensive

The Soviet command which was directing the heroic defense of Stalingrad even during the most critical periods of the unprecedented battle was preparing for a counteroffensive.

As a result of the enormous creative work carried out by Headquarters and the military councils of the fronts, a plan was compiled for a strategic operation which was codenamed Uran [Uranus] which was marked by the decisiveness of aims, boldness of concept and enormous scope. The counteroffensive was to be developed on a 400-km front, and should grow into a strategic operation of three fronts, the Southwestern, Don and Stalingrad. Strong pincer strikes were to be made, the enemy defenses were to be broken on the flanks of the basic enemy grouping, and it was to be surrounded and crushed.

The troops of the Don Front consisting of the 65th, 24th and 66th armies were to make two strikes: the first from the region of Kletskaya to the southeast and the second from the region of Kachalinskaya toward Vertyachiy for the purpose of cutting off the enemy on the defensive in the small bend of the Don from its grouping in the region of Stalingrad. The actions of the troops of the front were to be supported by the 16th AA.

The most important conditions for the successful operations of the AA in the forthcoming operation were the high combat and political preparation of the personnel and the supplying of the army with all the material and technical means.

The staff of the 16th AA carefully planned the air operations in the counteroffensive, it promptly gave missions to executors, it organized coordination with the ground forces, it organized control over the combat readiness of the troops and the command of the air formations, and carried out a number of other measures related to preparations for the operation.

For the purposes of strengthening political work among the personnel of the AA in line with the pending counteroffensive, the entire political apparatus was sent into the units. The primary party and Komsomol organizations and the army press strengthened the propagandizing of the combat experience of the best air fighters, and they explained to the men the appeal of the front military council and the orders of the army commander. Among the technical personnel which was readying the aircraft and weapons for the combat sorties, a socialist competition was widely developed to reduce the times for readying the combat aircraft and repairing the fleet.

Work was intensified in inducting military aviators into the ranks of the party and Komsomol. Many achieved the high honor of going into battle as a communist. The army political workers organized meetings between the fighters and the rear workers, and in the units they discussed the orders of the Soviet people to the defenders of the motherland.

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In preparing for the counteroffensive, one of the main concerns for the rear air services was the creation of stockpiles of fuel and ammunition. For transporting them, the army's motor transport had to work at a maximum pitch. Many drivers did not leave their vehicles for weeks.

The entire personnel of the army repair facilities as well as special brigades of engineers and technicians from the units were employed in rebuilding aircraft that were out of commission. In the units this work was organized around-the-clock. "All forces and means to repair the aircraft!" This was the motto under which the Komsomol and party meetings were held.

The fighting strength of the 16th AA in October-November 1942 increased somewhat and became stronger. The army was strengthened primarily due to the increase in the number of aircraft in the fighter and assault air regiments, as these had been converted to new establishments and instead of two squadrons there were three. Each regiment was to have 32 aircraft instead of 20, and in each flight there were two elements instead of three aircraft. This reorganization made the regiments more viable and sharply increased their combat capabilities.

During this time the AA received scores of new Yak-1 and Yak-7 aircraft as well as the LaGG-3 with a 37-mm cannon. This strengthened our fighter aviation. By 19 November the army had 342 aircraft (including 249 in working order); with 103 assault planes, 125 fighters, 93 night bombers, 7 reconnaissance planes and 14 liaison planes.

At the end of November, the 16th AA received the II Bomber Air Corps (bak) under the command of Maj Gen Avn I. L. Turkel'. The air corps consisted of two bomber air divisions (bad) with Pe-2 aircraft: the 223d under the command of Col L. N. Yuzeyev and the 285th headed by Hero of the Soviet Union, Col V. A. Sandalov. The corps had 122 aircraft in flying condition.

On the basis of the 325th orae, the 16th odrap was organized with Pe-2 aircraft (commander Maj D. S. Sherstyuk, deputy commander for political affairs, Maj M. N. Korolev).

As a total by the start of the counteroffensive, the Southwestern, Don and Stalingrad fronts had 1,350 flying combat aircraft. Of this number, 308 (Po-2, R-5 and SB) were night bombers. The overall leadership for all the air forces was entrusted by Headquarters to the commander of the Red Army Air Force, Col Gen Avn A. A. Novikov, who with a small operations group was in the Stalingrad area. In addition to the tactical aviation, certain long-range air formations were also involved in the counteroffensive.

The German command in the Stalingrad sector by that time had over 1,200 combat aircraft. The enemy aviation had somewhat reduced its activities. This was explained by the high combat losses and the difficult weather conditions, by the increased resistance from Soviet aviation and antiaircraft weapons, as well as by the enemy's fuel shortage caused by supply difficulties. Nevertheless the enemy aviation did not halt air reconnaissance and

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the bombing of the battle formations of our troops defending Stalingrad, the crossings over the Volga and certain rear installations.

For this reason, in preparing for the counteroffensive a great deal of attention was given to countering enemy aviation. This was carried out according to a plan worked out by the army staff, both by destroying enemy aircraft in dogfights as well as at the airfields.

By the start of November, in commemoration of the 25th anniversary of Great October, the assault planes and fighters from the 16th AA made a number of strikes against six close enemy airfields. For this 18 night crews were assigned from the 228th shad. For covering the assault planes and for sealing off the enemy airfields, fighters were assigned from the 220th iad. The assault planes from the 291st shad attacked in a single group the Bol'shaya Rossoshka Airfield, and the cover was provided by the 283d iad. All the strikes were made in the predawn darkness and were marked by great effectiveness. Thus, on 2 November, at Morozovsk Airfield the pilots from the groups of Capt G. I. Kopayev and Sr Lt M. I. Bobrov destroyed 14 fascist aircraft.

Air reconnaissance also assumed great significance. This was carried out by all the branches of aviation. In the sector of the main strike of the troops of the front, the enemy defenses were photographed to their entire depth. The air scouts disclosed the system of field works and the grouping of enemy troops, and this made it possible to determine the weak points in the defenses and then make the strongest strikes against them.

Along with carrying out the missions of combatting enemy aviation and air reconnaissance, the units of the AA from 1 through 19 November destroyed the reserves of the fascist army. Basically these operations were carried out by the 271st nbad. The night bombers not only caused losses to the enemy, but also wore down the enemy troops before the operation. During this period combat missions were excellently carried out by the following crews: pilot M. I. Gutorov and navigator P. A. Yefimov, A. S. Gavrilov and Buynov, P. S. Ponomarev and N. K. Piven', Plekhanov and Matveyev, Ye. N. Sinayskiy and A. P. Golovko, Cheryayev and N. M. Khokhlov, and V. I. Zubov and D. I. Yezerskiy.

"One must mention the humble workhorses of the war," recalled Mar Avn S. I. Rudenko about the pilots from the night bomber regiments, "who flew in the light-motored Po-2 aircraft. They attacked the enemy without missing almost a single night. They were stopped neither by the wind, a snowstorm or even a perilous fog. There were nights when the pilots made seven-eight sorties each. And this seemingly inoffensive training airplane carried up to 350 kg of bombs, that is, half the amount that the Il-2 assault plane could carry."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Dvesti Ognennykh Dney" [200 Fiery Days] (Collection of Essays), Moscow, Voenizdat, 1968, p 125.

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With the coming of dawn, the assault planes began operating and these attacked the Nazi troops located in front of the 24th and 66th armies.

In November up to the start of the operation the AA used for combat five limited flying days and nine nights during which around 1,300 combat sorties were made (basically at night). At that time pilots from the 6th Detached Medical Air Squadron did good work. They carried out 96 sorties and transported 233 wounded and hundreds of kilograms of various medicines.

The personnel of the 16th AA was seized with a desire to cause maximum losses to the high-handed enemy. Being in a state of combat readiness and in clearly knowing their place in combat, the pilots waited impatiently for the start of the counteroffensive.

Two days before the start of the counteroffensive, the air army with the full force of bombers and assault planes was to attack the rail junctions and enemy airfields. With the start of the operation, the bombers were assigned for attacking enemy troops and particularly its reserves in the zone of the 65th and 24th armies. The formations of assault planes were to support the troops of these armies in piercing the enemy defenses, and destroy personnel and artillery. The mission of the fighters was to escort the bombers and assault planes and provide cover for our troops and rear installations against enemy aviation. Moreover, all the branches of aviation were to carry out air reconnaissance. However it was impossible to carry out the designated plan fully because of the difficult meteorological conditions.

From the morning of 19 November, the army commander, Gen S. I. Rudenko, was already at the command post of the front, where the troop commander, Gen K. K. Rokossovskiy, and members of the front military council had also arrived.

There was a dense fog. The planned air strikes were aborted. For improving the morale of the infantry, the troop commander decided to begin operations using elements and individual planes. After a heavy softening up by the artillery, the troops of the 65th Army went over to the offensive and in fighting literally for each meter of land, by the end of the day had advanced 3-5 km.

When the weather had improved somewhat, our aviation began to support the troops of the front. The 228th shad took to the air. Some 30 assault planes under the cover of 24 Yak-1 made a bombing and strafing strike against the enemy. Here the group of Capt G. P. Kostandi fought skillfully.

Air reconnaissance was carried out by assault planes from the 694th and 688th shap. Here the pilots of Sr Lt S. I. Vinnik and Lt V. F. Khokhlachev particularly distinguished themselves. With low cloudiness and poor visibility in diving runs they secured valuable information on the retreat of the enemy. The reconnaissance data were immediately considered by the command of the front. The pilots of the 291st shad individually and in elements also conducted reconnaissance and destroyed the retreating enemy troops.

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On that day because of the extremely difficult weather conditions (fog and snow) great skill and courage were required from the fliers. They succeeded in carrying out just 82 combat sorties, however the information of the crews helped shed light on the course of events on the battlefield and this was of important significance for the leadership of the operation. The fascist aviation did not operate.

During the night of 21 November, the weather improved somewhat and the fliers of the AA made a bombing and strafing attack against several enemy airfields, destroying 14 aircraft on them. The assault aviation destroyed enemy personnel and equipment in the regions of Verkhne-Buzinovka and Ventsey, and aided in the advance of the ground forces. As a total 103 sorties were made.

On this day, the actions of six Il-2 crews from the 228th shap led by Hero of the Soviet Union, Capt V. M. Golubev were an example of combat skill. In approaching the fascist airfield, they were fired on by antiaircraft guns. Having neutralized the air defense weapons, the pilots attacked the airfield and destroyed eight enemy aircraft. On the return the group was attacked by fighters. In the course of the aerial combat, our pilots shot down one Messerschmitt and returned to their airfield without losses.

On 22 November, because of the bad weather, the aviation was not active.

On 23 November, the troops of the Southwestern and Stalingrad fronts joined together in the region of Kalach and completed the encirclement of the enemy grouping. During the day the units of the AA supported the offensive of the troops, attacking the retreating enemy along the left bank of the Don some 50-60 km to the northwest of Stalingrad. In 53 sorties the pilots destroyed 110 motor vehicles, 6 tanks, 5 gasoline trucks and several hundred enemy soldiers and officers.

Four assault planes from the 694th shap led by the regiment navigator Sr Lt M. I. Bobrov attacked a vehicle column on the Peskovatka--Bol'shaya Rossoshka road and destroyed up to 80 motor vehicles and 4 loaded gasoline trucks. On the same day, the pilots of the 688th shap, the communists Sr Sgt I. V. Gololobov, Lts I. F. Bibishev and V. D. Volovikov, Sr Lt A. I. Kadomtsev, and Capts A. A. Bondar' and G. I. Kopayev, carried out their mission excellently.

In the second half of the day of 24 November, with an improvement in the weather, the 16th AA began operations with greater intensity. The aviation in 144 sorties attacked the enemy concentration areas and its crossings on the Don in the regions of Nizhniy Akatov, Luchenskiy and Gerasimovskiy.

Two groups of assault planes from the 688th shap escorted by fighters from the 220th iad led by Capts G. I. Kopayev and A. A. Bondar' attacked an enemy infantry column and dispersed it. Groups from the 285th shap headed by the leader Hero of the Soviet Union, Capt V. M. Golubev and Capt P. P. Pospelov fought excellently as well.

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During the period from 23 through 30 November 1942, the basic efforts of the AA units were aimed at suppressing the strongpoints, as well as destroying enemy personnel and equipment in the retreat. The region of encirclement was being squeezed. Our troops captured the airfields of Ventsy, Yevlampiyevskiy, Kalach and Paskovatka with the aircraft. A number of other enemy airfields were also under attack. On 28 November, our pilots destroyed 29 enemy aircraft at Gumrak and Vol'shaya Rossoshka airfields.

The fascist command was forced to quickly rebase the aircraft to the west, to airfields 200-250 km away from the front of encirclement (Morozovsk, Tatsinskaya and others), and for this reason the operations of enemy aviation declined sharply. Just from 50 to 200 overflights per day were noted, mainly air transports. The operations of enemy fighters were limited to covering the transports.

On 28 November, Sr Lt M. I. Bobrov died a hero's death. He was leading a group of assault planes from the 694th shap. Over Bol'shaya Rossoshka Airfield, his aircraft caught fire from antiaircraft artillery firing. Communist Bobrov headed the assault plane engulfed in flames toward the parking area of enemy aircraft. With a mighty explosion six airplanes were destroyed.

Regardless of the very difficult weather conditions, the units of the 16th AA from 19 through 30 November carried out 1,479 combat sorties. During this 37 airplanes were destroyed at the airfields, 9 Junkers were shot down in air combat, 19 tanks were destroyed on the ground as well as 645 motor vehicles and 32 guns; a large number of Nazis was destroyed.

As a total in November, the AA made only 2,847 combat sorties, including 68 percent for bombing and strafing attacks against enemy troops and airfields. The pilots of the army carried out 32 air battles and shot down 33 enemy aircraft, and 63 aircraft were destroyed at the airfields. Our combat losses were 35 aircraft.

The Air Blockade and Participation in Eliminating the Surrounded Grouping

By 30 November, the area of the encircled enemy grouping had been reduced by almost double. On a territory of 1,500 km<sup>2</sup>, the 6th Field Army and a portion of the formations from the enemy 4th Tank Army consisting of 22 divisions and 160 detached units numbering up to 330,000 men with numerous combat equipment was being squeezed in a ring.

Our ground forces and aviation were given the mission of dependably sealing off the surrounded grouping of fascist troops, to wear it down by continuous blows, as well as repel the enemy attempts to break through the front of encirclement, having thereby prepared conditions for the complete elimination of the enemy. The destruction of the surrounded enemy grouping was entrusted to the troops of the Don and Stalingrad fronts.

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The German Supreme Command for relieving the surrounded 6th Army began hurriedly to organize a new army group Don headed by Mannstein. The German air transport which at that time had around 320 Ju-52 transports (with a payload up to 1 ton) was entrusted with supplying the surrounded grouping with everything needed for active defenses and a subsequent counterstrike. According to Hitler's order, around 300 tons of fuel, ammunition and food was to be delivered to the Stalingrad region daily. The Nazis hurriedly readied two large airfields at Tatsinskaya and Morozovsk as the basic supply bases for the surrounded troops.

The mass arrival of the German air transports into the Stalingrad region started on 23-25 November. They flew without fighter cover in small groups and as single planes from various directions.

For the purposes of countering the enemy air transports, Gen S. I. Rudenko on 26 November issued an order which defined the basic missions of aviation under the new situation. For intercepting and destroying the transports, patrolling was to be instituted over the area of the encirclement; the enemy transports were to be destroyed on the approaches to it; a chain of fighter ambushes was to be set up as well as a network of guidance radios and VNOS [air observation warning and communications] posts; air reconnaissance was to be carried out over the surrounded troops as well as combat to provide air support for the combined-arms armies. The 512th IAP was ordered to start continuous combating of the enemy transports from the Kotluban' Airfield.

At the start of the blockade, the taking off of the fighters and their actions in the air were controlled by the command post of the air army at Kotluban' Airfield; it had contact with all the airfields and the command post of the 8th AA. This made it possible at any moment to increase the forces in the air and carry out interaction.

The fighters and assault planes of the 16th AA began to shoot down the enemy transports. However, soon thereafter the fight against them became more difficult. The transports began to be escorted by Me-109 and Me-110 fighters and a portion of them had been specially equipped with additional fuel tanks.

The number of flights by the German transports to Stalingrad began to increase each day and soon reached 60-70 aircraft per day, and sometimes 100-150.

Within the ring of encirclement, the German command used five airfields for receiving the transports (Bol'shaya Rossoshka, Basargino, Pitomnik, Gumrak and Voroponovo), and at these there were up to 40 fighters which took off to rendezvous with the transports. After unloading the airplanes took on sick and wounded and returned to the base airfields.

It soon became apparent that the operation of the enemy air transport could not be disrupted by mere ambushes by fighters and assault planes (fighting as fighters).



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At the outset of December, upon instructions from the representative of Headquarters, Gen A. A. Novikov, the command and the staff of the 16th AA, with the participation of representatives from other staffs, worked out a more ordered system for the air blockade against the surrounded enemy troops. The main mission of the air armies during the period of the blockade was a decisive destruction of the enemy transports.

The blockade system envisaged the deployment of a network of warning and guidance stations, the creation of combat zones around the ring of encirclement for the three air armies, the long-range aviation and the antiaircraft weapons of the three fronts, as well as the organizing of an air and artillery blockade of the airfields within the surrounded territory.

The first zone was located behind the external front of encirclement and was the zone of operations for the pilots of the 17th AA, and from the end of December the 8th AA, as well as the long-range aviation. They destroyed the enemy aircraft primarily at the base airfields. Between the external and internal fronts of encirclement (the second zone), the fighters of the 8th AA and 16th AA operated. This zone was split into five sectors (in terms of the number of the IAD), two of which were within the zone for which the 16th AA was responsible. In the sectors, two-fighter elements were constantly on patrol, while at the airfields there were fighter and assault plane groups on duty which could take off upon call or "by sight." Each sector had its own open radio guidance network and all the equipment necessary for this.

The third zone, 8-10 km wide, which bordered the region of encirclement was a zone of organized antiaircraft firing, and was divided into regions.

The commanders of the fighter aviation and the antiaircraft artillery, in continuously maintaining personal contact, achieved precise interaction. With the appearance of enemy aircraft, the antiaircraft gunners made several sighting shots. In following the bursts, the fighters began pursuit. Then the antiaircraft gunners set up barrage firing in front of the enemy pilots, and this forced them to alter course and concentrate on different things. This facilitated the subsequent actions of the fighters. When our fighters were not near, the antiaircraft gunners fired for effect. The results of the well organized cooperation were soon felt. Our fighters and antiaircraft gunners began to shoot down up to 30 percent of the enemy aircraft which flew over.

In the fourth zone, in the region of the encircled grouping of fascist troops, the enemy aircraft were destroyed by fighters, bombers and assault planes basically from the 16th AA.

For the purpose of overcoming the air blockade, the enemy attempted to organize the escorting of large formations of transports under fighter cover into the region of encirclement. But, due to the well organized

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spotting and warning, such convoys became the objects of attack by our fighters and suffered heavy losses. Thus, on 30 December a convoy of 17 Ju-52 airplanes under the cover of four Me-109 in the region of Gumrak was caught by four of our "hunters" headed by the commander of the 283d iad, Col V. A. Kitayev. As a result of the energetic and able attacks, they shot down five Ju-52 and one Me-109. Here Col Kitayev and Maj F. D. Yeliseyev shot down two Junkers each, while Maj D. I. Rodin and A. A. Kukushkin had one fascist aircraft to their score.

The "hunters" on 12 December fought just as successfully. As a result of the correct allocating of duties between the pilots and their decisive attacks, Col V. A. Kitayev, Maj D. I. Rodin and F. D. Yeliseyev, Lt N. V. Kharitonov and Jr Lt I. Ya. Kostykin shot down four Ju-52 and three Me-109.

Maj F. D. Yeliseyev, the deputy commander of the 520th iap for political affairs, skillfully directed party political work in the regiment and at the same time, as a first-rate pilot, by his personal example demonstrated how one must fight the Nazi invaders.

The pilots of the 520th iap under the command of Maj S. N. Chirva during the period of the Battle of Stalingrad conducted 125 dogfights and shot down 95 fascist aircraft. Moreover, 15 aircraft were destroyed on the airfields. For the excellent fulfillment of combat missions, the regiment became a guards one. The regimental commander Maj S. N. Chirva was given the Order of the Red Banner by the command and promoted to commander of the air division. During the Battle of Stalingrad the best air fighters in the regiment were Maj D. I. Rodin, MSgt V. F. Vinogradov (they each had 8-9 victories in the air), Capt A. A. Yefremov and Lt N. V. Kharitonov (each had 11-12 shot down enemy aircraft to their score), and others.

Without having air superiority, the Nazis soon abandoned flights in large groups and began to more widely use the restricted flying weather, cloudiness and darkness. For providing cover during take-off and landing of the transports, the Nazi command shifted one of its best fighter units, the Udet Squadron, into the ring of encirclement.

The combating of this was rather difficult. The command of the 16th AA used the method of a continuous increase of forces in the air battles. The enemy was forced either to wage long battles with our crews which relieved one another or to abandon the area of combat to us.

For strengthening the defense of airfields in the ring of encirclement, the fascists brought up almost all the antiaircraft artillery of the 6th Army. However these airfields were soon within the reach of our artillery fire. The air scouts supplied the artillery troops with photographs of the airfields and this made it possible to conduct precise fire against them.

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The strikes by our aviation against the enemy airfields became more and more effective every day. Thus, on 2 December, the pilots set 17 enemy air transports afire at airfields inside the ring of encirclement, and on 10-13 December, 87 transports. Here the fighters also fought excellently. On 13 December, the 220th IAD destroyed 10 aircraft at the airfields, and on 26 December the pilots of the 520th IAP, Capt A. A. Yefremov, Sgts V. S. Ziberov, A. P. Konov, Kirvtsov, A. M. Mel'gunov and M. M. Reznikov set 8 Ju-52 aircraft on fire.

At the start of December, Col I. K. Samokhin arrived to assume the position of deputy commander of the AA.

The 291st ShAD was assigned to the reserves of Headquarters. During 3 months of combat, under conditions of a difficult situation, the personnel of the division, in showing examples of courage and heroism, made more than 1,000 combat sorties for strafing, having destroyed a large amount of enemy military equipment and personnel during this.

In the course of the air blockade against the enemy grouping, a major role was played by air reconnaissance, the data of which served as the basis for calling in our aviation for destroying enemy transports at the airfields. The air scouts during this period kept under constant control the surrounded fascist troops which were preparing to break out to link up with the Mannstein group. And this was done with good reason. On 10 and 11 December, the fliers discovered a large accumulation of enemy troops in the region of Bol'shaya Rossoshka, Uvarovka and Orlovka.

On 12 December the Kotel'nikov grouping began an offensive in the direction of Stalingrad. The Soviet command demanded that the 16th AA intensify its attacks against the surrounded fascist troops.

From the morning of 12 December, the air scouts detected a large number of tanks, assault guns and armored personnel carriers in the region of Karpovka, and behind them, infantry ready to start a breakout. The bombers and assault planes of the AA soon appeared. They made a heavy bombing strike against the Nazi troops, they destroyed a large number of personnel and equipment and scattered them, thereby preventing the attempt by the Paulus army to break out of the encirclement.

In the middle of December, from air reconnaissance data, it was learned that the surrounded enemy troops were again concentrating for the purpose of breaking the front of encirclement. These data were affirmed by the information of prisoners. Mannstein's units at this time were moving steadily ahead and they were separated by not more than 40-45 km from the surrounded grouping. The 16th AA was ordered to prevent the breakout.

On the morning of 18 December, 112 aircraft took off for a concentrated strike against the accumulation of enemy troops at Balka Yablonevaya. This force consisted of 74 Pe-2 bombers, 10 Il-2 assault planes and 28 Yak-1 fighters. The Pe-2, aircraft from the 2nd IAP, were the first over the

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target. Their bombing strike was a surprise for the surrounded fascists, a panic started in the enemy ranks, as here and there fires broke out and ammunition exploded.

The second wave included assault planes from the 228th shad headed by the commander of the 243d shap, Maj A. G. Nakonechnikov. Initially they made a divebombing attack. On the following runs, the assault planes strafed the fascists using cannons and machine guns and they destroyed the artillery, tanks and vehicles. The cover fighters, under the command of Hero of the Soviet Union Maj V. I. Shishkin, also participated in the attacks, destroying the enemy with machine gun and cannon fire. During the entire day, the assault planes in groups of 7-9 aircraft continued to attack the enemy, scattering the personnel and destroying equipment. The effectiveness of the divebombing attacks was very high. In suffering high casualties, the enemy troops gave up the attempts to break out of the encirclement. As a total during the day the fliers of the AA carried out 459 sorties.

On 19 and 20 December, the aviators supported the troops of the adjacent Stalingrad Front and together with fliers from the 8th AA attacked the tanks of the Kotel'nikov grouping which was advancing toward Stalingrad. For these purposes the units of the 16th AA made 112 sorties. As a result of the intense air combat which developed in the region of the Myshkova River, the German fighters were driven from the battlefield. This made it possible for the assault planes and bombers to cause great losses to the enemy troops with impunity. At the same time aviation provided support to the troops of the 21st and 65th armies. The fighters of the army covered the 2d Guards Army against an air enemy, and this army unloaded from the trains without losses and simultaneously began combat. In 2 days, the AA carried out 796 sorties.

On 24 December, the tank troops of the 1st Guards Army by a rapid raid occupied the airfields of Tatsinskaya and Morozovsk. At the Tatsinskaya Airfield, up to 350 aircraft, mainly transports, were captured and destroyed by the tanks. An air supply of the troops surrounded at Stalingrad became even more difficult for the Nazis.

In suffering such high losses of aircraft and having lost the basic air transport bases, the German command sharply reduced the transport flights and began to use He-111 bombers for transporting cargo into the area of encirclement. These bombers possessed greater range, speed and defense capability. They also used the long-range reconnaissance planes, the four-motor FW-200 Kondor. It became more difficult to combat there aircraft. But by this time the pilots of the 16AA had succeeded in suppressing the resistance of German fighters inside the ring and to strengthen the blockade of the airfields during the day and at night.

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As a result, the Germans almost completely abandoned the landing of transports inside the surrounded grouping, and resorted to dropping cargo by parachute mainly at night. This was less dangerous, but at the same time the possibility of evacuating the wounded and the staffs was finally lost. Many enemy pilots began to drop the cargo before reaching the zone of anti-aircraft fire. Bags with clothing, tanks with gasoline, ammunition and food more and more frequently fell in the positions of our troops.

The German pilots who left on a trip to the region of Stalingrad began in their circles to be called "deadmen." The officers and generals of the 6th Army who had been permitted to leave the "pot," were no longer determined to fly out as this was too risky. On one December day, Soviet fliers shot down Ju-52 airplanes with the staff officers of the 376th Infantry Division, as well as a four-motor Kondor which carried 32 officers. The commander of the shot-down aircraft stated that he had flown into the surrounded grouping with orders to bring out the commander of an infantry division, but the commander had refused to fly and was soon taken prisoner.

At the end of December the elimination of the grouping of Nazi troops surrounded in the region of Stalingrad was entrusted by Headquarters to the Don Front.

During this period the fascist command, regardless of the enormous losses, still continued to send new groups of airplanes to Stalingrad. They endeavored to break through any obstacles or any weather. The best crews were shifted from the Berlin--Paris and Berlin--Rome routes to the Stalingrad sector. But even they could not always reach Stalingrad. During the night of 1 January 1943, five German transports suffered a catastrophe due to bad weather conditions on our territory. And those crews which still succeeded in reaching the area of the surrounded grouping in a majority of instances were destroyed by our aviation or by antiaircraft weapons. As a whole the system of our air blockade operated quite effectively.

In December 1942, the formations and units of the 16th AA made 4,125 sorties. Basic attention was given to strikes against airfields (25 percent of the sorties), air reconnaissance (20 percent), and to "free hunting" and the intercepting of enemy aircraft (15 percent). The remainder of the sorties were carried out to provide cover for troops and railway installations (16 percent), for escorting aviation (16 percent) and for actions against enemy troops (8 percent).

The fliers of the army carried out 96 dogfights in which they shot down 68 fascist aircraft, and at the airfields destroyed 244 aircraft of different types. In addition, 57 tanks, 64 guns, 780 vehicles and other military equipment were destroyed and damaged, and a large number of enemy soldiers and officers was knocked out.

The air army in December lost 64 aircraft.

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By January 1943, the aircraft fleet of the 16th AA had increased significantly due to the arrival of the 2nd bak, as well as to the receiving of new aircraft (48 Yak-1 and 40 Il-2) by the air units. On 10 January 1943, the fighting force of the AA included 215 fighters, 103 assault planes, 105 daytime bombers and 87 night bombers and 15 reconnaissance planes, as well as 75 liaison aircraft and transports. As a total the AA had 600 aircraft and 488 battle-ready crews.

At the beginning of January 1943, in carrying out the directives of the Troop commander of the Don Front, the command and staff of the AA worked out an air operations plan for eliminating the surrounded enemy grouping. The plan envisaged over 500 sorties on the first day. Here, during the night of 10 January, control of the enemy troops was to be disrupted during the night of 10 January. Then powerful strikes were to follow by the 2nd bak and the 228th shad. At the same time, the fighters of the 220th iad were to seal off the airfields inside the ring of encirclement, and during the day the daytime bomber and assault plane forces were to disrupt the possible counterattacks and prevent the reserves from being brought up. These actions were to be reliably supported by the fighters and air reconnaissance.

By the start of the operation to eliminate the surrounded enemy at Stalin-grad, our aviation had complete air superiority.

A portion of the air formations of the AA was rebased to new airfields for the purpose of bringing them closer to the areas of forthcoming combat. The bombers were stationed 70-100 km from the front line, and the fighters and assault planes, 20-50 km.

On 10 January 1943, at 0805 hours, heavy artillery preparatory fire started and this lasted 55 minutes. With dawn the formations of the 16th AA made a massed raid on the battle formations of the Nazi troops. After this the storming of their positions commenced.

Our aviation was continuously over the battlefield. The strong explosions of bombs merged with the powerful roar of artillery fire. The enemy strong-points and defensive works were blown skyward by the air attacks, and the artillery batteries fell silent. The aviation operated in groups which differed in terms of the number of aircraft, from several planes up to 60-70. The guidance radio network which was deployed along the entire front and the air representatives in the troops helped the crews detect and hit the most important enemy objectives.

During the first day of the operation, the AA made 676 sorties, attacking enemy personnel, staffs and centers of resistance in the regions of Bol'shaya and Malaya Rossoshka, Baburkin, Zapadnovka and Novo-Alesyevskiy. All enemy airfields within the ring of encirclement were completely sealed off from the air. The fliers of the 2nd bak fought actively, and they carried out 198 sorties (during the period of the Battle of Stalingrad they carried out 1,853 sorties). Aviation destroyed 17 tanks, 145 vehicles and a large amount of other equipment. In 25 dogfights, Soviet fighters shot down 14 enemy aircraft and hit 9 of them.

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Gen P. I. Batov, troop commander of the 65th Army, had high praise for the aviation operations. In an order of 29 January 1943, he wrote: "The crews by their bold strafing attacks and excellent bombing of the enemy battle formations and its strongpoints contributed to the successful carrying out of the mission of the final defeat and destruction of the surrounded troops."<sup>1</sup>

On 12 January, the AA continued to attack enemy troops in the regions of Zapadnovka, Karpovskaya Station, Balka Yablonevaya, in operating in groups of 6-9 assault planes and bombers. During the day 433 sorties were made and much enemy military equipment was destroyed.

On 13 January and on the following days, with the advance of the troops of the Don Front, the formations of the 16th AA attacked enemy personnel and military equipment deep in the enemy defenses. At the airfields on 13 January the enemy lost 29 Ju-52 and He-111.

On 18 January, Lt I. F. Bibishev, the deputy squadron commander of the 688th shap died a death of the brave. In the region of Gumrak Airfield his airplane caught on fire. The courageous pilot, without regard for saving his own life, in the burning aircraft dove into a parking area of enemy airplanes. To his score were over 100 daytime and 40 nighttime combat sorties. Communist I. F. Bibishev was posthumously awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

In January, the fighter pilots of the 220th and 283d iad, in continuing to blockade the enemy airfields and attack the surrounded enemy troops in the region of Stalingrad, actively carried out dogfights and won a number of victories. Thus, on 12 January, a group consisting of four Yak-1 of the 176th iap of the 283d iad, under the command of Sr Lt M. I. Makarevich, in the region of Bol'shaya Rossoshka shot down three enemy aircraft. Here in addition to the leader, Lts Gerasimenko and Mikyahlenok and Jr Lt Ordin distinguished themselves. On 17 January, four Yak-1 from the 520th iap under the command of Capt A. A. Yefremov in blockading Gumrak Airfield destroyed one Ju-88, and on 19 January, four Yak-1 headed by MSgt V. F. Vinogradov, in carrying out the same mission, shot down two He-111. The fliers of other air regiments also had victories in the air.

After the second rejection of the proposals of the Soviet command to surrender, our troops on 22 January began the final stage of the operation, the cutting up and destruction of the enemy grouping.

Air superiority won by our aviation at the outset of the counteroffensive told favorably on the operations of the troops in the front. The assault planes without obstruction could make 4-6 passes at a target, dropping several bombs in each pass and firing at the enemy from the cannons and machine guns. The bombers began to operate in groups up to 40 aircraft.

<sup>1</sup> Arkhiv MO SSSR, folio 368, inv. 6476, file 93, sheet 16.

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In the second half of January, our troops captured the last enemy airfield in the ring of encirclement, Pitomnik, and through this the entire supply of the Paulus Army had been channeled. On 24 January the last air transport escaped from the ring of encirclement from the hurriedly prepared field near the settlement of Stalingradskiy. The "air bridge" by which the Nazi command had endeavored to help the surrounded grouping ceased to exist. Up to the start of February at night individual enemy aircraft still appeared and they randomly dropped their cargo by aircraft, but this was already the agony of the German Luftwaffe at Stalingrad.

Mar SU M. V. Zakharov has written of the importance of the air blockade implemented by our aviation at Stalingrad in the foreword to the book "Stalingradskaya Epopeya" [The Stalingrad Epoch] as follows:

"The Battle of Stalingrad provided...practice in organizing an air blockade for the purpose of interdicting the supply of the surrounded grouping by air. The precise organization of the air blockade combined with the successful offensive of Soviet troops on the external front of encirclement made it possible to defeat the enemy air grouping created to support the breakout of the 6th Army."

On 2 February 1943 the remnants of the enemy grouping were eliminated.

During the period of the final elimination of the surrounded enemy grouping at Stalingrad (January and the first 2 days of February 1943), the 16th AA carried out 8,741 sorties, including 4,681 for the bombing and strafing of surrounded enemy troops, 1,586 for attacking airfields and the blockading of them, 1,276 for providing cover for troops and aviation, 379 for reconnaissance, and 338 sorties for "free hunting."

In 144 dogfights our pilots destroyed 96 enemy aircraft and set 110 on fire at airfields.

In the course of eliminating the surrounded enemy grouping, units of the AA destroyed and damaged 234 tanks, 2,404 vehicles, 98 artillery pieces, they blew up 30 various dumps, and destroyed or put out of commission many thousands of Nazis.

The combined-arms command repeatedly thank-d the aviators for the help which they gave the troops both in the defensive engagement as well as in the course of the encirclement and elimination of the surrounded enemy grouping. Here is one such document.

"Order to the troops of the 66th Army of 31 January 1943. During the difficult August-October days for the motherland, when the enemy was pushing to the Volga heartland, the valorous troops of our army in close cooperation with the air fighters of the 16th AA, steadfastly repelled the numberless enemy attacks on the ground and in the air. During the period of the



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preparations for and encirclement of the crack enemy troops at Stalingrad, the command of the 66th Army considers it necessary to note the exceptionally great role of the air units and formations of the 16th AA which in coordination with our troops mercilessly destroyed the fascist scum in the area of Stalingrad.

"We, the soldiers and commanders, are witness of the heroic feats of the aviators of the 16th AA who are totally loyal to the motherland and who during the day and at night, disdaining all difficulties, by bombing and strafing attacks destroyed and ground down the enemy forces. The military council of the army, the soldiers, the commanders and political workers express complete satisfaction with the operations of the air fighters, the fliers of the 16th AA, and pass on their Red Army thanks.

"The commander of the 66th Army, Lt Gen Zhadov, member of the military council, Col Krivulin, and chief of staff Maj Gen Korzhenevich."<sup>1</sup>

For combat excellence, courage and mass heroism of the personnel evidenced in the Battle of Stalingrad, by the orders of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, the following air divisions and regiments were turned into guards units:

- 1) The 220th iad (commander, Col A. V. Utin) became the First Guards iad; the 512th, 237th and 581st iap of this division (commanders, respectively, Hero of the Soviet Union Lt Col N. S. Gersimov, Lt Col Ye. P. Mel'nikov, and Hero of the Soviet Union Lt Col V. I. Shishkin) into the 53d, 54th and 55th Guards iap;
- 2) The 228th shad (commander, Col G. I. Komarov) into the 2nd Guards shad; the 285th, 688th, 243d and 313th shap of this division (commanders, Majs Ye. P. Koval', M. G. Sklyarov, A. G. Nakonechnikov and I. D. Borodin) became the 58th, 59th, 78th and 79th Guards shap;
- 3) The 434th detached iap (commander, Hero of the Soviet Union Maj I. I. Kleshchev) became the 32d Guards iap;
- 4) The 520th iap (commander, Lt Col S. N. Chirva) became the 56th Guards iap; the 150th bap (commander, Maj V. A. Novikov) became the 35th Guards bap; the 99th bap (commander, Lt Col A. Yu. Yakobson) became the 96th Guards bap; the 702d and 901st nbap (commanders, Capt S. A. Kiselev and Maj A. A. Menyayev) of the 271st nbad became the 44th and 45th Guards nbap; the 6th Air Transport Regiment (trap) of the GVF [Civil Air Fleet] (commander, Maj V. M. Trutayev) became the 62d Guards trap of the GVF.

At the same time, honorary names were given honorary names as follows: Stalingrad to the 1st Guards iad (during the period of the Battle of Stalingrad the pilots of the division in 370 dogfights had destroyed 334 fascist aircraft), to the 271st nbad (commander, Col M. Kh. Borisenko),

<sup>1</sup> Arkhiv MO SSSR, folio 368, inv. 6476, file 93, sheet 16.

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to the 53d Guards iap and to the 16th odrap (commander, Maj D. S. Sherstyuk); the name Volga to the 78th Guards shap and Don to the 58th Guards shap. The 283d iad (commander, Col V. A. Kitayev) was given the name Kamyshin, the 56th Guards iap received the name Altukhovo, and the 907th nbap (commander, Lt Col N. F. Pushkarev), received the name Gorodishche-Stalingradskoye.

Many soldiers of the 16th AA received orders and medals for heroism and courage shown in the battles of Stalingrad, and all participants in the Battle of Stalingrad received the medal "For the Defense of Stalingrad."

On 23 November 1942, by an Ukase of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet, Sr Lt A. Ya. Baklan, flight commander of the 434th iap, received the title of Hero of the Soviet Union for courage, heroism and valor.

Aleksandr Yakovlevich Baklan was born in 1917 in the Ukraine. As a 22-year-old pilot he participated in the battles against the White Finns. From the outset of the Great Patriotic War, he showed himself to be a bold and experienced fighter pilot. On some days he made five-seven combat sorties. He frequently entered combat against a numerically superior enemy. In one battle he alone fought against seven enemy fighters and destroyed two Messerschmitts. Being severely wounded, he was still able to save his aircraft. During the first 18 months of the war, Baklan made around 400 combat sorties and in dogfights personally shot down 13 enemy aircraft, and 23 in group combat.

On 28 January 1943, for the exemplary fulfillment of combat missions and for heroism shown in this, the title of Hero of the Soviet Union was awarded to the best fliers of the AA, including: Capt V. N. Makarov, squadron commander of the 512th iap, Capt I. P. Motornyy, commander of the 512th iap, and Capt Z. V. Semenyuk, inspector pilot of the 220th iap.

Valentin Nikolayevich Makarov was born in 1919. He began serving in aviation as a young man of 18. As a fighter element commander, V. N. Makarov from the very first days of the Great Patriotic War proved to be an able air fighter. For a series of victories over the enemy even at the end of 1941 he was awarded two Orders of the Red Banner, and in August 1942, the Order of Lenin. V. N. Makarov joined the Communist Party in 1942. By the start of 1943, he had 462 combat sorties to his score, 118 dogfights, 15 enemy aircraft shot down personally and 4 as part of a group. At present Maj Gen Avn V. N. Makarov is continuing to serve in the ranks of the USSR Armed Forces.

Ivan Porfir'yevich Motornyy was born in 1918 in Nikolayevskaya Oblast. As a youth he worked as a lathe operator. He joined the Red Army in 1937 and completed the Odessa Flight School. He began the Great Patriotic War as a flight commander of the 512th iap where he rose to the level of regiment commander. He proved himself to be an intrepid pilot and able commander. He joined the Communist Party in 1942. For combat skill and

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courage Capt Motornyy in 1942 received the Order of Lenin and two Orders of the Red Banner. By the start of 1943 he had made 453 combat sorties and conducted 117 dogfights in which he had shot down 15 fascist aircraft. Subsequently this score was increased. At present I. P. Motornyy works as the chief mechanical engineer at one of the large combines in Riga.

Zakhar Vladimirovich Semenyuk was born in Zhitomirskaya Oblast in 1919. In 1938, he completed Odessa Flight School. He joined the VKP(b) in 1941. He started the Great Patriotic War as a flight commander and ended as the inspector pilot of an air division. As of January 1943 Capt Semenyuk had 357 combat sorties to his score. He had carried out 95 dogfights and personally shot down 14 enemy aircraft, and 4 in a group. He received the Order of Lenin and two Orders of the Red Banner. After the war he completed the Red Banner Air Force Academy and later commanded a regiment and a division. In 1958, Col Z. V. Semenyuk died prematurely.

On 1 May 1943, the squadron navigators of the 99th bap Capts A. P. Krupin and A. M. Turikov, and the deputy squadron commander of the 520th iap Sr Lt N. V. Kharitonov were granted the title of Hero of the Soviet Union for the courage and heroism shown in the Battle of Stalingrad.

In the fierce engagements the commanders of the air formations and units demonstrated the ability to organize and carry out involved combat missions, and to control their units and subunits. They served as an example for their subordinates. Many of them were promoted to more responsible positions and became prominent aviation chiefs. Here are just two of them.

The commander of the 220th iad, Col A. V. Utin, entered the war as a major, and was in command of an air regiment and division, and from July 1943, the VI Guards Fighter Air Corps with which he fought all the way to Berlin. He was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union for personal feats and for the exemplary fulfillment of missions of the command. After the end of the war he commanded the aviation of a district and became a lieutenant general aviation.

The commander of the 291st sad, Col A. N. Vitruk began the war as a major and ended it as a Hero of the Soviet Union and major general aviation. With his famous 10th Guards shad he took an active part in expelling the Nazi troops from Yugoslavia, and for this he was awarded the title of People's Hero of Yugoslavia.

The 16th AA during the period of the Battle of Stalingrad carried out 26,656 combat sorties, including 10,588 for bombing and strafing actions against the Nazi invaders, 4,116 for providing cover for troops and rear installations of the front, 3,087 for attacking enemy airfields and blockading them, 4,262 for providing cover for their own airfields and escorting aircraft, 2,402 for air reconnaissance, and 1,508 for intercepting enemy aircraft and for "free hunting."

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During the 5 months the fliers of the AA conducted 820 dogfights and destroyed 571 enemy aircraft in the air and 454 at airfields. During this period their losses were 3-fold less.

During the designated time, over 800 tanks and armored vehicles, up to 500 artillery pieces, more than 6,000 motor vehicles and much other military equipment as well as enemy personnel were destroyed and put out of action.

As a result of the world historical victory at Stalingrad, there was a fundamental change in the course of the Great Patriotic War and World War II.

"In this battle," said Comrade L. I. Brezhnev, General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, at a meeting devoted to the opening of the monument at Mamayevyy Kurgan, "not only were crack Nazi troops crushed. Here the offensive thrust gave out and the moral of fascism was broken. The collapse of the fascist bloc started."<sup>1</sup>

After Stalingrad the strategic initiative passed firmly into the hands of the Soviet Supreme High Command. Our troops went over to a general offensive which in fact continued until the war's end.

For the Soviet Air Force, the Battle of Stalingrad was a serious testing of combat maturity and skill. It was successfully passed by our aviation. Upon recognition of the German command, the fascists lost an entire air army at Stalingrad. The victory of Soviet aviation at the walls of the Volga fortress was an important stage on the path to the subsequent winning of strategic air superiority.

The battle along the shores of the Volga also was of great significance for the 16th AA. The AA was born in the fire of the great engagement and it was tempered and grew stronger. Its personnel showed true heroism and total dedication to their fatherland. From operation to operation the might of the AA rose and grew stronger, its operational application was improved and air tactics were developed.

In the course of the battle, the most important mission of the 16th AA was to provide the greatest possible aid to the ground forces, and more than 64 percent of the sorties were spent on this. The basic efforts of aviation in the defensive operation were aimed at destroying the approaching enemy reserves and the enemy concentrations on the battlefield as well as at supporting the counterstrikes by our troops. During the period of the counteroffensive, the air formations and units of the AA participated in preparing for the breakthrough and in the continuous support of the advancing troops, carrying out, in essence, the missions of an air offensive. They constantly provided reconnaissance and cover for their troops.

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<sup>1</sup> L. I. Brezhnev, "Leninskii Kursom" [By the Leninist Course], Speeches and Articles, Vol 2, Moscow, Politizdat, 1970, p 68.

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In carrying out these missions the fliers provided substantial aid to the troops, having won the profound respect of the soldiers and commanders. In the course of combat aviation acquired rich experience in organizing and carrying out precise coordination with the ground forces.

In the Battle of Stalingrad, simultaneously with the fierce engagements on the ground, an extremely tense struggle developed for air superiority, and for our aviation this became one of the most important missions taking up over 30 percent of all sorties. Regardless of the numerical superiority of fascist aviation and the seizing of initiative by it, our aviation, and above all the fliers of the 8th and 16th AA, succeeded in moving from an air defense to an offensive and to defeat the enemy air armada. The victory was achieved due to the high moral strength of the Soviet fliers and their mass heroism, to the prompt quantitative and qualitative reinforcing of the aircraft fleet of the AA, to the bringing in of the forces from the 2d and 17th AA and units of the air defense and long-range aviation into the struggle for air superiority in the Stalingrad sector, as well as due to the continuous improvement in the methods of the combat use of aviation, and in particular the tactics of conducting air combat. At Stalingrad, the best flying units of fascist Germany were defeated.

During the concluding stage of this great battle, the fliers of the 16th AA, together with the fliers of the adjacent AA and the antiaircraft troops of the Don and Stalingrad fronts, successfully carried out an air blockade of the surrounded enemy grouping. As a result of this the enemy air transport suffered irrecoverable losses, and this accelerated the complete defeat of the fascist army of 330,000 men which was deprived of the possibility of reinforcement and supply by air.

At Stalingrad a beginning was made to controlling aviation by radio from the ground and in deploying a detection, warning and guidance system for groups of aircraft over the battlefield. This helped to win air superiority and in more effective air operations against ground targets.

In the combat support of troops and aviation, air reconnaissance held a very important place, and its significance grew continuously. In possessing initially several reconnaissance aircraft, the AA by the end of the battle on the Volga had a reconnaissance regiment and, in addition, used squadrons of fighters and assault planes for carrying out reconnaissance. This made it possible to conduct reconnaissance during the day and at night and with great frequency. This supplied the needs of the command and the troops.

In the course of combat, the rear services of the AA also acquired great experience. Regardless of the short time of their formation, the rear units learned under difficult autumn and weather conditions to create the necessary airfield network for the army and supply combat both in a defensive operation and in a counteroffensive.

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The victory at Stalingrad was achieved due to the enormous moral superiority of our troops over the Nazi aggressors. All the personnel of our troops, including the 16th AA, was seized by the same desire, to stop the enemy and deal him a crushing blow. The leading and guiding activities of the Communist Party were continuously felt, and the party led and inspired the men to fight against the Nazi invaders.

The party political work which was developed in the formations, units and subunits played an enormous role in indoctrinating this noble patriotic desire. The basic content of the party political work was an indoctrination of a feeling of high responsibility for the fate of the Soviet motherland and hate for fascism. The party called for a continuous improvement in combat skill and an unstinting struggle against the enemy up to the point of its complete destruction.

In fierce battles the Soviet fliers showed their total loyalty to the cause of the Leninist party, an inflexible will for victory and military valor. Many of them died heroically in a fatal clash with the enemy. Many began combat in the sky over the Volga steppes as inexperienced novices and ended the battle as mature air fighters and able commanders.

The command, political, flight-technical and rank-and-file personnel of the air units and formations were tempered and united in the course of the Battle of Stalingrad into a single combat collective fused together by conscious high military discipline.

Emerging from the fire of the Battle of Stalingrad victorious, together with the ground forces the personnel of the 16th AA in February 1943 was ready to carry out new combat missions. The party's slogan "Stand to the Death!" now gave way to the appeal "Forward, To the West!"

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CHAPTER 2: FROM THE "FIERY" ARC TO THE DNEPR

The Preparations for the Battle on the Kursk Salient

In February 1943, after the defeat of the Nazi troops at Stalingrad, by a decision of Hq SHC, the Central Front was formed headed by Gen Arm K. K. Rokossovskiy (member of the military council, Maj Gen K. F. Telegin, chief of staff Lt Gen M. S. Malinin). The front was comprised basically of troops from the former Don Front and included the 16th AA.

The troops of the Central Front were deployed between the Bryansk and Voronezh fronts, and up to the middle of March participated in battles in the Orel sector. In the second half of March, they went over to the defensive, forming the northern face of the Kursk Salient.

The 16th AA was rebased from Stalingrad in the following fighting strength: the 1st Guards iad (commander, Col A. V. Utin, and from August Col V. V. Sukhoryabov), the 283d iad (commander, twice Hero of the Soviet Union, Lt Gen Avn S. P. Denisov, and from December, Col S. N. Chirva), the 2d Guards shad (commander, Col G. O. Komarov), the 271st nbad (commander, Col M. Kh. Borisenko), the 16th odrap and the 11th Training Regiment (utap) (commanders, Lt Cols D. S. Sherstyuk and M. M. Kuz'min).

In March the AA received the III Bomber Air Corps (commander, Maj Gen Avn A. Z. Karavatskiy) including the 241st bad (24th, 128th and 779th bap) and the 301st bad (34th, 54th and 96th Guards bap). The air divisions were under the command of Cols I. G. Kurilenko and F. M. Fedorenko, the 299th shad (the 41st, 217th, 218th, 431st and 874th shap) was under Col I. V. Krupskiy, and the 286th iad (165th, 721st, 739th and 896th iap) under Col I. I. Ivanov. In May, the AA received the VI Fighter Air Corps (iak) (commander, Hero of the Soviet Union Maj Gen Avn A. B. Yumashev, and from July Hero of the Soviet Union, Maj Gen Avn Ye. Ye. Yerlykin) consisting of the 237d iad (157th, 163d and 347th iap) under the command of Col I. Ye. Fedorov, and the 279th iad (92d, 192d and 486th iap), under the command of Col F. N. Dement'yev, as well as the VI Mixed Air Corps (sak) (commander, Hero of the Soviet Union Maj Gen Avn I. D. Antoshkin) consisting of the 221st bad (the 8th Guards, 57th and 745th bap) under the command of Col S. V. Buzylev, and the 282d iad (127th, 517th and 774th iap) under the command of Col Yu. M. Berkai'.

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All the air formations had combat experience, but many of the air units had up to 50 percent young fliers from the reserve regiments in their fighting strength. The commanders and political workers from the newly arrived air corps and divisions were experienced, energetic and enterprising leaders. They had many years of experience of flight and political work as well as combat experience acquired from the outbreak of the war against the Nazi invaders.

In April 1943, Col P. I. Brayko was appointed chief of staff of the 16th AA. Petr Ignat'yevich [Brayko] was born in 1902 in a worker family. He began serving in the Red Army from the age of 17. In 1927 he joined the VKP(b). From 1928 he served in the aviation. Initially he was a spotter pilot and then held staff and command positions. During the Great Patriotic War he moved from the chief of staff of an air regiment to the chief of staff of an air corps. From this position P. I. Brayko was appointed the chief of staff of the air army.

At the same time, Maj Gen Av M. M. Kosykh was promoted to the position of deputy commander of the 16th AA.

During the period of the preparations for the battle on the Kursk arc, to bring the headquarters of the AA up to full strength experienced and well trained officers were assigned to the positions of chiefs of departments, as follows: Operations Col I. I. Ostrovskiy, reconnaissance, Lt Col G. K. Prussakov, communications Lt Col N. D. Ignatov, air defense Col I. N. Bodukhin, the air gunnery service Lt Col S. A. Basov, technical supply Col A. G. Doroshenko, organization and manning Col B. I. Plaksa, and chief of staff for rear services Lt Col M. A. Golodyayevskiy.

After rebasing to the Central Front and reinforcing, the AA during March operated against railway junctions in the Orel sector, against roads leading to the front, against the enemy reserves as well as against enemy troops on the battlefield. It provided cover for the battle formations of our troops and lines of communications against attack by enemy aviation and carried out air reconnaissance.

During March the air army carried out 5,178 combat sorties, it conducted 94 dogfights and shot down 53 aircraft; on the ground 23 enemy aircraft were destroyed as well as a large quantity of enemy military equipment.

The fascist command, in endeavoring to weaken the consequences of the major defeats of its troops in the winter of 1942-1943 and to regain the lost strategic initiative on the Soviet-German Front, in the spring began to prepare a new offensive (under the codename of Citadel) against the Soviet troops which had occupied the Kursk Salient. The Nazis created two strong groupings which were to carry out pincer strikes in the general direction of Kursk. In the region to the south of Orel they concentrated over 15 divisions, including 6 tank, up to 3,500 guns and mortars and up to 1,200 tanks and assault guns. A similar grouping of approximately the same composition was deployed to the north of Khar'kov.



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The enemy grouping in the region of Orel was supported by the 6th Air Fleet numbering up to 900 aircraft, and as a total in the region of the Kursk Salient were concentrated 2,050 enemy aircraft, that is, two-thirds of the aviation operating at that time on the Soviet-German Front.

The Central Voronezh and Southwestern fronts by the start of the German offensive had 2,650 aircraft. Thus, the overall balance of forces in terms of aviation was in our favor.

The Soviet Supreme High Command, having promptly detected the enemy's plans, decided initially by a stubborn and active defense to wear down and bleed the advancing enemy, and then to move over to a counteroffensive and crush its assault groupings.

The 16th AA, in preparing for the defensive operation, was to provide cover against air strikes for the troops of the front, the rear installations and lines of communications, to carry out continuous reconnaissance, to impede the advance of enemy troops by attacking them at their bases and on the way to the front, to destroy enemy aviation at the airfields and be ready to support our troops in the event of enemy attack.

On the basis of the decision of the commander of the AA, the staff elaborated a combat plan for the forthcoming operation in three versions, proceeding from the most probable directions of the main strike by the Nazi troops. In accord with this the staffs of the air formations and units elaborated their own plans and clarified the questions of control and interaction with the ground forces and between the branches of aviation. At the command post of the commander of the combined arms army on the main sector an auxiliary command post (VPU) was organized for the AA.

The cover for the troops and rear installations was entrusted to the 6th iak and the 1st Guards iad. In addition, all the fighter units had duty subunits on alert for taking off to repel enemy aviation, and when necessary they could participate in full strength in repelling the attacks. For guiding the fighters to the enemy aircraft and for controlling them in the air, radios were established along the forward edge, and here were stationed responsible representatives of the air divisions.

Long before the operation for the support of the bombers and assault planes, fighter air formations had been assigned to them. The operations of the 3d iak were to be supported by fighters from the 6th iak, the 2d Guards shad by the 283d iad, and the 299th shad by the 286th iad; the 6th iak had a fighter air division as part of it.

The basic method of providing cover for the bombers and assault planes was the direct escorting of them to the target, over the target and upon return. Moreover, depending upon the air situation, it was proposed that a group of fighters would be sent out ahead of time to the area where our bombers and assault planes were to operate for the purpose of neutralizing the enemy fighters.

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In March, the enemy aviation did not show any particular activeness in front of the Central Front. By the start of April this made it possible to shift the basic forces of the 16th AA to rear airfields (80-200 km behind the front line) for overhauling the aviation equipment, and for providing combat training and shaping up of the young flight personnel. The necessity of pulling back the air formations was also caused by the spring muddy season, when many forward airfields for an extended time became unsuitable for the basing of aviation.

In line with the inactivity of the troops on both sides at the forward airfields only the 283d iad and the Guards 79th shap and the 44th nbap were left. They were given the following missions: To repel attacks by enemy aviation and provide cover for our troops, periodic sorties for strafing upon call from the forward command posts, nighttime operations to disrupt enemy movements and the conducting of reconnaissance. Operational air reconnaissance was carried out by the 16th odrap and a squadron of the 98th Guards odrap of the V GK from their own airfields.

In the course of combat training with the flight and technical personnel, chief attention was paid to increasing combat skills and mastering the operation of the air equipment, as well as to studying the combat experience of the best crews. The personnel of the 286th iad was retrained for the La-5 aircraft which surpassed the fascist fighters by 40-80 km per hour in speed as well as in terms of vertical maneuvers.

In all the air units and formations, conferences were held for the flight and technical personnel, and after which the command of the air army held a 2-day assembly for the commanders and chiefs of staff of the air formations. At the assembly reports were heard by Gen S. I. Rudenko "Our Missions for the Spring-Summer Season of 1943" and the commanders of the 3d bak, the 2d Guards shad and the 1st Guards iad "On the Combat Use of Bombers, Assault Planes and Fighters and Coordination Between Them."

In April 1943, the 16th AA carried out 1,601 combat sorties, and here the pilots carried out 13 dogfights in which four enemy aircraft were destroyed, while six were destroyed and damaged on the ground, having lost four of our own airplanes.

At the start of May, the air formations of the AA were shifted to the forward airfields, where combat training was continued. Here chief attention was given to mastering the Air Force tactics and the air equipment, as well as to improving navigator and air gunnery training. Flight training was aimed at sharpening piloting techniques, at improving team-work in the combat formations of the flights and squadrons in carrying out various missions, and on working out the methods of conducting air combat, particularly group. The young fliers learned of the combat area and it was overflown. The personnel studied the ground and air enemy.

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The political departments of the army and the air formations as well as the party and Komsomol organizations during the period of preparations for the operation carried out extensive work to mobilize all the personnel to successfully carry out the missions of the command. The commanders and political workers explained the situation on the fronts to the aviators, they popularized the combat experience of the army in previous battles, and organized meetings of the young men with former fliers and navigators.

The command, the political bodies, the party and Komsomol organizations indoctrinated in the personnel an unrestrained offensive drive and readiness to carry out the set missions at any price.

The engineer and technical personnel of the air formations, units and repair bodies of the army organized precise work to rebuild and repair the aviation equipment. The air specialists worked without considering the time. As a result, the number of flying aircraft reached 91 percent of the available.

The units of the air army rear services in April-June 1943 also intensely prepared for the pending operation. By its start the rear bodies consisted of 30 bao which were organized in five (21st, 56th, 75th, 79th and 80th) RAB, four airfield engineer battalions, three airfield technical battalions, four head air depots, nine field air repair shops, one stationary air shop, fourteen airfield technical teams, one motor vehicle shop and one transport air squadron. All the bao were 90-100 percent of full strength in terms of personnel and two-thirds in terms of motor transport and special vehicles.

Within the boundaries of the AA there were 128 airfields (around one-third was occupied by aviation) and 9 fields for the Po-2 aircraft. This completely met the combat operations of the air formations and units. The airfields of the fighters, assault planes and night bombers were 25-35 km away from the front line, and for the daytime bombers, a distance of 60-70 km. Manmade [camouflage] covers were found at eight airfields. At a larger portion of the airfields, dugouts, command posts and shelters for the aircraft had been built. Two-thirds of the airfields had natural camouflage.

In addition to the operating airfields, up to 50 dummy ones were built with 240 aircraft dummies. In the preparatory period for the operation, they were attacked by enemy aviation 61 times.

The created supplies of fuel and ammunition were sufficient to support the combat operations of the AA for 8-9 days. In addition, there was a 3-day untouched reserve.

From May 1943, the combat operations of the 16th AA grew more active. All the air formations and units were involved in this. Along with combat preparations, the army provided cover for the troops of the front, the Kursk railroad junction, the section of the Kursk--Kastornoye railroad and its own airfields, it conducted air reconnaissance, it destroyed enemy aviation in the air and at the airfields of the Orel air center, it attacked troops discovered by air reconnaissance and bombed railroad stations and tracks.

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The ground forces, as a rule, were provided with cover by sorties to repel enemy aviation from a status of "airfield duty," by call from the forward command posts of the commanders of the 6th iak and the 1st Guards iad. In some instances troop cover was provided by patrolling. This was the case, for example, in June when the troops of the 13th Army carried out a partial operation.

The cover for the railroad junctions of Kursk and Kastornoye and the section of the road between them was provided by the periodic patrolling of one or two fighter elements, as well as sorties to repel enemy aviation by flights, squadrons and regiments on duty at the airfields.

On our own airfields were covered by fighter elements and fours which were constantly in a state of readiness No 1. They took off from data of the VNOS posts of "by eye" (upon a signal from the regimental command post). When necessary the basic strength of the squadrons and regiments took off after the duty crews.

The fighters took off in groups of 2-3 and more elements to intercept enemy bombers. In echeloning the flight in altitude, they tied down the enemy cover fires in combat with a portion of the forces while the main forces attacked the bombers.

The reconnoitering of the Nazi troops and aviation in the basic sectors was carried out with the intention of discovering the plans of the German command. By the middle of May the air scouts in the region of Orel and Kromy had established a concentration of over 900 enemy tanks and up to 1,500 vehicles, and over 580 enemy aircraft at the 16 airfields of this sector. It was clear that the enemy was preparing a strike from Orel to the south. In June alone, 1,660 combat sorties were made for reconnaissance out of the total of 6,060.

Tactical air reconnaissance was carried out during the day basically by fighter elements and fours. Depending upon the situation and the area of reconnaissance, the composition of the group was sometimes increased up to a squadron. In many of the iad, the best squadrons were isolated and these were mainly concerned with reconnaissance and were rarely used for carrying out other combat missions. In June, fighters for the first time used aerial photography and this provided good results. Nighttime reconnaissance was carried out by the crews of the Po-2 aircraft.

Operational reconnaissance was carried out by the 16th odrap and the assigned crews of bombers on Pe-2 aircraft. The results of the aerial photography were used in making the map blanks for the troops.

For the purpose of weakening the enemy air grouping in the central section of the Soviet-German Front and for creating favorable conditions for winning air superiority, according to the plan of Headquarters, during the period from 6 through 8 May, a large air operation was carried out for the first time to destroy enemy aviation at airfields located along a broad front (up to 1,200 km). Six air armies participated in the operation.

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Prior to the start of the operation, careful air reconnaissance was organized and this not only disclosed the base points of enemy aviation but also determined the combat operational procedures. For this reason the attacks were confined to the time when the largest number of aircraft and personnel had accumulated at the airfields.

According to the plan, on 6 May at 1427 hours, 200 aircraft from the 16th AA (24 Pe-2 from the 3d bak, 64 Il-2 from the 2d Guards shad and the 299th shad, and 112 fighters from the 1st Guards, the 283d and 286th iad) made a massed attack on the airfields of the Orel Air center. At the enemy airfields, 54 aircraft, 15 motor vehicles, 5 fuel and ammunition dumps were destroyed and damaged, 9 firing positions of small caliber antiaircraft artillery (SCAA) were neutralized and over 20 fires started.

The air strikes against the airfields were combined with active air combat over enemy territory. Here our fighters succeeded in destroying 22 enemy aircraft in the air.

On 7 May, during the day attacks were made against the airfield of Kulikovka (14 Il-2 from the 299th shad and 12 La-5 from the 286th iad) and against the Khmelevaya airfield (12 Il-2 from the 2d Guards shad and 14 Yak-1 from the 283d iad).

At the Kulikovka airfield, regardless of the heavy counteractions of the SCAA and enemy fighters, 16 enemy aircraft were destroyed. The strike against the Khmelevaya airfield was unsuccessful.

For carrying out attacks on enemy airfields, on 6 May the AA lost 27 assault planes and 8 fighters, mainly for the following reasons: Surprise of the attack was not achieved and the enemy succeeded in readying its fighters and SCAA to repel the raid; enemy antiaircraft weapons were not sufficiently suppressed; the adjacent enemy airfields were not promptly sealed off by fighters from the 1st Guards iad (they arrived late at the target); the battle formation of the assault planes and the cover fighters in entering the zone of strong antiaircraft fire was disrupted and this weakened their defenses against enemy fighters; the interaction between the assault planes and their covering fighters had not been sufficiently worked out in practice in conducting joint air combat.

Disconcerted by the raids from our aviation, the Nazi command was forced to relocate many air units into the rear, and to spread out and carefully camouflage its aircraft.

In addition to strikes on airfields and railroad stations, the air formations and units of the AA periodically bombed and strafed enemy troops discovered by reconnaissance, in making over 1,200 aircraft sorties in June for this purpose.

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The daytime bombers of the 3d bak operated in groups of 9-18 Pe-2 aircraft under the cover of 8-16 fighters. The bombs were dropped on the target from altitudes of 1,300-3,000 meters from horizontal flight.

The assault planes from the 2d Guards and 299th shad made attacks against enemy personnel and military equipment in groups from 6-8 aircraft up to 2-3 squadrons under the cover of the same number of fighters. The assault planes operated from altitudes of from 1,300-900 meters to a dive, they used a "circular" battle formation and attacked the targets in elements or in single aircraft with several passes.

The 271st nbad carried out night bombings of the enemy using Po-2 aircraft. In May and June, it made 5,480 combat sorties. In addition to the material damage these bombers had an exhausting effect on the enemy troops, reducing their morale.

In addition to periodic attacks on airfields and enemy troop accumulations, the air units also attacked other objectives. Thus, at the end of April 1943, information was received on the quartering of enemy staffs, the concentration of troops and the presence of enemy depots in the settlement of Lokot' and at the railroad station at Brasovo. On 5 May, 50 Pe-2 aircraft from the 301st bad, under the cover of fighters from the 283d iad, made a heavy attack against these objectives. From a message received from the staff of the Partisan Movement, as a result of the bomber strike, in the settlement of Lokot' the building where a major German staff was quartered was destroyed as well as the dumps and several houses in which were quartered the German commandant's office and a troop unit heading to the front. Around 300 soldiers and policemen, and several armored vehicles and tanks were lost to the Nazis on that day. At Brasovo Station, a troop train was destroyed and a fuel dump blown up. The bombers lost two crews.

The strikes by our daytime and night bombers against railroad stations and track disrupted the transporting of enemy troops and their supply. The railroad section of Orel--Glazunovka was subjected to systematic nighttime bombing. In May alone, 500 sorties were made against this section. Operations on the Orel--Bryansk leg were carried out by solitary Pe-2 aircraft during daylight from great heights. In May, up to 100 sorties were made to bomb the stations of Chiginok, Putivl' and Vasil'yevka.

Very significant efforts of the army's fighters were required to repel the massed raids by enemy aviation on the Kursk railroad junction.

The first raid by German aviation was made early in the morning of 22 May in waves of 110 bombers of the Ju-87, Ju-88, He-111 and Me-110 types under the cover of 60-70 FW-190 and Me-109 fighters. Two groups of the first wave of 68 bombers under the cover of 60 fighters reached the railroad junction and bombed it, basically by divebombing, from an altitude of 4,000 meters.

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Our fighters who were notified late about the raid met the first groups of enemy aircraft only in the area of the target where the Messerschmitts and Fokker-Wulfs had created a solid curtain around the bombers. Our pilots pursued them upon the return from the target and carried aerial combat against them.

Our fighters put up strong resistance to the subsequent groups of enemy bombers, and as a result of this the Nazi pilots dropped a majority of the bombs haphazardly, in the field or on the outskirts of the city. The last group of the third wave were prevented from reaching Kursk by our fighters.

During this raid, 76 enemy aircraft were shot down, including 38 by fighters from the 16th AA, 30 by air defense fighters, and 8 by antiaircraft artillery. The work of the Kursk railroad junction was disrupted for 10-12 hours.

Here are certain examples of the operations of the army's fighters which were sent up to repel the raid by enemy aviation.

At 0505 hours the approach of a large group of German bombers under fighter cover was noted from the Budanovka airfield (the 283d iad). Then Yak-1 on duty took off "by eye" from the airfields of Budanovka, Shchigry Yuzhnyye [south] and Kursk Zapadnyy [west]. In climbing, eight fighters attacked the enemy bombers while an element engaged the fighters. The attack of our pilots disrupted the battle formation of the bombers. In benefiting from this, Jr Lts V. F. Vinogradov, V. A. Baranov and V. P. Vusikov shot down three Ju-87 bombers, and N. V. Ivanov shot down a FW-190. Combat was carried out predominantly in elements at altitudes of from 3,000 to 600 meters.

During the same time, the squadron on duty took off from Shchigry Yuzhnyye airfield consisting of seven Yak-7 from the 519th iap of the 283 iad under the command of Sr Lt V. A. Bashkirov. In the region of Kursk, our fighters encountered a group of Ju-87 under the cover of Me-109. Three elements of Yaks attacked the enemy bombers and in closely coordinating they disrupted their battle formation and shot down six Junkers. Sr Lt Bashkirov was climbing in order to engage the enemy fighters and at the same time was controlling the group by radio. Soon he spotted a Messerschmitt which was about to attack an element of Yaks. Bashkirov hurried to help his comrades and by the first attack shot down a Nazi vulture.

On 2 June, the German aviation made a larger raid against the Kursk railroad junction. About 550 airplanes participated in this raid, including more than 420 Ju-88 and He-111 bombers and Me-110 fighter bombers, as well as around 120 Me-109 and FW-190 cover fighters. The enemy aircraft approached the railroad junction from different directions and at different altitudes. This raid was repelled by fighters from the 16th and 2d AA, the 101st Air Defense iad and the antiaircraft artillery of the Central and Voronezh fronts.

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The first wave of enemy aviation numbering 137 bombers and 30 fighters appeared around 0500 hours from the direction of Orel and was intercepted at the distant approaches to Kursk at a height of around 3,000 meters. The Soviet fliers, having forced combat on the cover fighters, attacked the enemy bombers with the main forces. The fascists did not expect such a meeting. Having lost 58 aircraft and having dropped their bombs beside the target, they hurriedly returned to their airfields. Only individual aircraft broke through to the railroad junction.

In the second and third waves which followed at altitudes of 4,000-5,000 meters from the same direction at 0640 hours and at 0830 hours, there were 120 bombers under the cover of 55 fighters. Some 86 Soviet fighters were raised against them, and by continuous attacks along the entire route of the enemy aircraft they shot down 34 bombers. Only 55 enemy aircraft broke through to the objective in separate small groups.

In the fourth and fifth waves there was a total of 167 bombers and 14 fighters. They appeared from the south at altitudes of 6,000-7,000 meters hoping thus to avoid interception at the distant approaches to Kursk. This deception partially succeeded. Although the Soviet command had brought up large fighter forces of some 205 aircraft, they were unable to intercept all groups of fascist aircraft. Around 100 enemy bombers still reached the target but were unable to destroy the junction. Our fighters, having tied down the enemy cover groups, with the basic forces scattered and destroyed the bombers in preventing precision bombing. As a result, over 70 percent of the bombs dropped by the fascist aircraft exploded far from the mark.

How the German fliers viewed the counteractions of our fighters on that day can be judged from the evidence of a prisoner of war F., a fighter pilot from the 51st Melders Squadron. The Nazi in an interrogation pointed out that on 2 June he had made three sorties, carrying 250 kg of bombs in each. On the first sortie he was unable to accurately drop the bombs due to heavy antiaircraft fire. In the third he had to carry out difficult combat against Russian fighters, but he was able still to drop the bomb. The third time he did not reach the target as he was shot down by our fighters.

Regardless of the fact that for the raids of 2 June the fascist command had used a large number of aircraft, the Kursk railroad junction was not destroyed. The junction resumed operations after 12 hours. But the losses of German aviation during the raid were enormous. The Germans lost 145 airplanes, including 104 from fighter attacks and 41 from antiaircraft artillery fire. The losses of Soviet aviation were 27 fighters.

Our pilots fought boldly and courageously, in demonstrating examples of heroism and intrepidity. During the 26 dogfights which were carried out that day, the characteristic qualities of Soviet aviators were again disclosed--boldness, decisiveness, high combat skill, a fervent love for their fatherland and a desire to vanquish the enemy no matter what the cost. Here are several examples.



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An element of our fighters piloted by Lt V. G. Baranov and Jr Lt M. T. Gavrilov broke straight into the formation of enemy bombers and scattered them, forcing the bombers to release their payloads over the forest. Here communist Gavrilov entered into single combat with two Fokker-Wulfs and after several attacks shot down one of them, while communist Baranov in fighting against the other element of enemy fighters, hit a fascist aircraft which, in smoking, returned to its territory losing altitude.

In another instance, a group of 50 enemy bombers attacked seven fighters from the 283d iad. This time the fascists encountered pilots who had been tempered in the battles of Stalingrad headed by the squadron commander Sr Lt H. A. Naydenov. On the first attack he shot down a Me-110, but himself came under the fire of two FW-190, and somewhat later another four enemy fighters. Naydenov in combat had repeatedly destroyed enemy aircraft with accurate fire, but now he was one against six. Having shot down another two Fokker-Wulfs, our ace emerged the victor from this difficult battle and in a damaged aircraft landed at his airfield. In August 1943, Sr Lt N. A. Naydenov was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. By this time he had made 281 combat sorties, to his score were 9 fascist aircraft shot down personally and 3 destroyed in a group with comrades.

We should particularly note the heroic actions of the flight commander of the 30th Guards iap of the 1st Guards iad, Sr Lt A. I. Gorgalyuk. With the appearance of the enemy bombers, he took off from Fatezh airfield at the head of the duty flight and intercepted the head group of fascist aircraft flying toward Kursk. He attacked first and destroyed the leader of the group and then turned against the second bomber and also shot it down. The wingmen engaged other enemy bombers and cover fighters. In an attack on the third bomber, Gorgalyuk set the right motors of the Junkers on fire, but at this moment was attacked by six enemy fighters and received a severe wound. His face was covered in blood. Unable to see anything, he bailed out and landed among our troops. It was impossible to restore the vision of the courageous patriot. In September 1943, Sr Lt A. I. Gorgalyuk was presented the title of hero of the Soviet Union. He had made 376 combat sorties and had shot down in dogfights 8 enemy aircraft personally and 5 in a group. At present Aleksandr Ivanovich Gorgalyuk, regardless of his complete loss of vision, works in Moscow as a deputy chief of one of the administrations of the All-Russian Society for the Blind, he participates in military patriotic work and often speaks before the youth.

Along with the heroic feats and skillfull actions of our fliers, shortcomings were also detected in the course of these dogfights. Certain young fliers, in desiring to increase their score of enemy aircraft shot down, at times in a dogfight became separated from their leaders and engaged in individual combat. These loners mainly became the victim of the German fighters. At times coordination was lacking in the actions between fighter groups, as a consequence of which our fliers engaged the enemy fighters and missed the German bombers.

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Subsequent to the daytime raids, the command of the German Luftwaffe attempted to disrupt the operations of the Kursk railroad junction by night bombings. On the night of 3 June, around 300 different types of aircraft were sent against Kursk. But this action was unsuccessful. The railroad junction continued operating.

It must be kept in mind that the raids on Kursk involved air units located not only in front of the Central Front but also from airfields in Bobruysk, Smolensk, Konotop, Poltava and Khar'kov.

Without reaching the desired end and suffering unjustified losses in aircraft and personnel, the German command was forced subsequently to abandon attempt to use large air forces for actions against our rear installations. From 3 June up to the start of the Battle of Kursk, enemy aviation did not make massed raids on our rear installations. All the daytime bombing strikes in this period against our rear objectives were made by enemy aviation predominantly in small fighter groups, basically the FW-190. Here, due to the high state of readiness and coordinated actions of our fighters and antiaircraft artillery as well as to the organized warning system, the enemy suffered great losses.

The enemy air force in May and June 1943 periodically operated against our airfields of Shchigry, Russkiy Brod, Pzhava, Zybino, Budanovka, Krasnaya Zarya and others, having made 14 raids involving around 450 aircraft. Thus, on 16 May, a group of Ju-87 and Me-110 bombers in a force up to 40 aircraft under the cover of Fokker-Wulfs attempted to attack the airfield of Shchigry (Yuzhnyye). To repel the attack, 15 Yak-7 were sent up from the 519th Iap. These intercepted the bombers, they partially scattered them and engaged them before approaching the target. Only individual Ju-87 aircraft and a group of Me-110 broke through to the airfield. Pursued by our fighters, they dropped the bombs chaotically, without causing any damage to the aircraft and personnel at the airfield. In this air battle the pilots of the 519th Iap succeeded in shooting down 10 enemy aircraft. Here Jr Lt S. I. Kolesnichenko destroyed two Me-110 and one FW-190, having clearly proved that with skillful mastery of the Yak-7 aircraft, with the able use of its weapons and by aimed firing from short range it was possible to successfully fight against the Me-110 and FW-190.

Enemy attacks against other airfields were also ineffective. Here the active resistance of our fighters was felt as well as the low level of enemy crew training, particularly for the wingmen, as well as the skillful dispersal, camouflaging and sheltering of the aircraft at our airfields.

Our aviation in May-June not only was fighting against enemy aviation but also, in preparing for decisive engagements, was operating against enemy troops in concentration areas, impeding troop movements, attacking rear objectives, carrying out reconnaissance, as well as providing support to our partisans. In carrying out this mission, on 3 June, the flight commander of the 96th Guards Iap, Hero of the Soviet Union, Sr Lt B. S.

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Bystrykh, was killed. At the head of 9 Pz-2 aircraft, he had taken off to attack a Nazi punitive detachment which had been surrounded by our partisans in the Bryansk forest. In the attack on the target his aircraft was shown down by antiaircraft fire. The navigator Lt Funayev perished with the pilot.

During the period of preparations for the summer engagements (April-June), the air units and formations of the 16th AA carried out 14,309 combat sorties. There were 343 air battles, and 308 enemy aircraft were shot down. Moreover, 104 aircraft were destroyed on the ground in attacking enemy airfields. During this period our aviation also suffered certain losses in air battles and from enemy antiaircraft artillery fire.

In making bombing and strafing attacks against the enemy, the Nazis were deprived of a significant amount of military equipment, weapons and personnel.

The missions confronting the 16th AA in the preparations for the Battle of Kursk were carried out.

In recalling the actions of our aviation during this period, Mar Avn S. Rudenko, in the collection "Kurskaya Bitva" [The Battle of Kursk] has written:

"All preparations for battles on the Kursk Salient were carried out in secret from the enemy. The following episode shows what great attention was given to keeping our intentions a secret. On one day in July I received a report from the chief of the intelligence department of the AA, Col G. K. Prussakov. Along with a map, he sent photographs which clearly showed two small groves to the south of Orel. A large number of German tanks was hidden in these groves. Judging from the tracks and other giveaway signs, the enemy had endeavored to conceal about two tank divisions here.

"The tanks which had been concentrated in a small area are always an enticing target for aviation. For this reason the thought immediately came to me of bombing these small forests and eliminating two German tank formations.

"I immediately went to see the troop commander of the front with my proposal. Gen K. K. Rokossovskiy carefully heard me out and then began to reason:

'Fine, we can make the Germans lose two divisions. On the other hand the enemy will know we are aware. It will make up the losses of these formations and then conceal them in such a manner that the air scouts will not find them however they try.'

"He went on:

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'For us now it is most important to convince the enemy that we are not informed of his intentions, and at the same time we ourselves must know well the grouping of enemy troops and the plans of the Nazi command. And for this we must not alarm the Germans ahead of time. But let them begin to advance and then hit these woods from the air. Only at that time there will scarcely be any tanks, we must pursue their movement and then cover them with bombs.'

"I could merely agree with Konstantin Konstantinovich [Rokossovskiy]. Each day we continued to send out scouts with photographed any suspicious areas of the terrain. According to our calculations it turned out that in front of the Central Front by the beginning of July the enemy had concentrated more than 1,000 tanks and assault guns. The last data of air reconnaissance showed that the enemy had basically completed the concentration of the troops."<sup>1</sup>

By 5 July 1943, the fighting strength of the AA numbered 1,052 flying combat aircraft, including 260 daytime bombers and 74 night bombers, 241 assault planes, 455 fighters, 22 reconnaissance and spotter planes. In each air division there were 75-95 flying aircraft (the 299th shad had up to 150 aircraft). The army had 1,028 battle-ready crews.

Support of the Troops in the Defensive Engagement

On 5 July 1943, at 0530 hours, after preparatory artillery firing and air strikes, the Nazi troops went over to an offensive against the troops of the Central Front making the main strike to the west of the Orel--Kursk railroad. This offensive was not expected for the Soviet troops. The troops and the aviation of the front had been brought to full combat readiness.

Around 0300 hours, our troops had undertaken heavy counterpreparation fire, as a result of which the enemy artillery was significantly suppressed and started the softening up process later and with weakened forces.

On the first day of the engagement, particularly fierce battles broke out in the sector of Maloarkhangel'sk and Yasnaya Polyana. Here the enemy tanks and infantry made up to 10 attacks during the day.

The offensive by the enemy troops was supported by massed air actions. Here each raid involved up to a hundred bombers under fighter cover. In just 1 hour in the middle of the day our aviation had to combat three waves of enemy aircraft. Flying in the first wave were up to 60 He-111 escorted by fighters. The second wave numbered up to 50 He-111 and Ju-87 under the direct cover of 20 FW-190 fighters; it followed the first wave at a distance of 3-4 km. Coming at the same distance was the third wave consisting of 20 bombers under the cover of 30-40 FW-190. The bombers flew at different

<sup>1</sup> "Kurskaya Bitva," Moscow, Nauka, 1970, pp 206-207.

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altitudes, obviously endeavoring to complicate the counteractions of the antiaircraft weapons and to scatter the forces of our fighters. Fighters from the 6th IAP and the 1st Guards IAD took off to fight the enemy aviation.

Our assault planes and bombers initially operated in small groups against the advancing enemy tanks, artillery and infantry. When the main direction of the attack by the Nazi troops had been established, the basic forces of the 16th AA were committed to action.

Here is what was written about this by Mar SU K. K. Rokossovskiy: "The time came to provide air support for the formations of ground troops. The commander of the 16th AA was ordered to attack the enemy which was breaking through. Rudenko put more than 200 fighters and 150 bombers in the air. Their strikes slowed down the pace of the Nazi offensive in this area, and this made it possible to shift the nearest reserves here. These forces succeeded in checking the enemy's advance."<sup>1</sup>

The bombers from the 3d IAP and the 6th IAP and the assault planes of the 2d Guards and 229th IAD received the mission during the day of destroying the enemy tanks, artillery and personnel operating basically in squadron-sized groups under fighter cover. Here for the first time our pilots used the hollow-charge antitank bombs (PTAB) which burned through the armor of the German Tiger and Panther tanks and put them out of action. An Il-2 aircraft could carry up to 200 such bombs.

During 5 July, our troops with air support steadily drove off the repeated enemy attacks. However by the end of the day on the main sector the enemy had succeeded in driving 6-8 km into our defenses.

In fierce air battles against large groups of enemy bombers and fighters, our fliers demonstrated examples of heroism, valor and courage. The flier of the 54th Guards IAP, Jr Lt V. K. Polyakov particularly distinguished himself. In a battle against the fascist bombers and the escorting fighters, he shot down one enemy aircraft, and himself was subjected to numerous attacks. His Yak-7 was set on fire. In the burning aircraft Polyakov overtook a He-111 and with a blow from the propeller and right wing knocked off the tail of the bomber, and then abandoned the damaged aircraft and landed among our troops in a parachute.

Komsomol member V. K. Polyakov had arrived at the front during the difficult days of the battles at Stalingrad. From the outset he had proven to be a courageous fighter. In September 1943 he was given the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. By that time he had made 75 combat sorties and had shot down 4 enemy aircraft (one of them by ramming). At present, Col V. K. Polyakov is a candidate of military sciences and teaches at the Red Banner Air Force Academy imeni Yu. A. Gagarin.

<sup>1</sup> K. K. Rokossovskiy, "Soldatskiy Dolg" [A Soldier's Duty], Moscow, Voenizdat, 1968, p 219.

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On that day, the assistant commander of the 519th iap for air gunnery service, Lt S. K. Kolesnichenko, destroyed three enemy aircraft. During one of the battles Kolesnichenko noticed that his wingman had bailed out of a hit aircraft and a fascist fighter was trying to fire on the parachuting Soviet flier. Kolesnichenko instantly came to help his comrade, he destroyed the fascist vulture and covered his wingman until he had landed. During the period of the Battle of Kursk Kolesnichenko shot down 16 enemy aircraft in air battles and in September was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. By this time he had made 114 combat sorties. On 21 October 1943, pilot S. K. Kolesnichenko died heroically in the battles for the motherland.

The squadron commander of the 53d Guards iap, Sr Lt P. P. Ratnikov, heading 8 fighters attacked a large group of enemy bombers. In the battle which started up, Ratnikov and Sr Sgt Zhigalov shot down three enemy aircraft. During the battles of Stalingrad and Kursk, P. P. Ratnikov made 220 combat sorties and in 85 dogfights personally shot down 11 enemy aircraft and 4 in a group. On 23 July he perished heroically, and a month later he was posthumously awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

Mar Avn S. I. Rudenko in the collection "Kurskaya Bitva" has written: "I observed dogfights a great deal, but never before had I seen such stubbornness, drive and such courage from our aviators. Even our enemies were forced to recognize the high moral-combat qualities of the Soviet fliers. The fascist general Mellenthin (a participant in the battles for the Kursk Bulge) in his memoirs wrote: 'In the course of this engagement the Russian fliers, regardless of the superiority of German aviation in the air, showed exceptional boldness'."

During 5 July, according to the air defense data, in the zone of the Central Front, around 2,300 overflights by enemy aircraft were recorded. According to information of Gen P. I. Brayko, there were moments when the enemy had simultaneously up to 300 bombers and at least 100 fighters over the battlefield.

On this day the fliers of the 16th AA made 1,232 combat sorties, they conducted 76 dogfights and shot down 106 enemy aircraft.

There were many examples of skillful actions, heroism and valor by our fliers. But also there were substantial mistakes. Certain fighter groups were not spread out in waves at different altitudes, they patrolled over their own territory, they preferred to engage the enemy fighters and often missed the enemy bombers without any real effect. Fighter control from the command posts of the 6th iak and the 1st Guards iad was not sufficiently precise.

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The combat of the assault planes and the bombers, mainly in squadron groups, as was intended by the plan of operations, did not produce the expected results in combating the large assault groupings of Nazi troops. The actions of the small groups of our aircraft were easily repelled by the enemy fighters and heavy antiaircraft fire on the main sectors of its offensive. As a result our aviation suffered high losses. The troops did not receive proper support from our aviation. It was necessary to change the decision.

In the evening of 5 July, Gen S. I. Rudenko, having returned from the command post of the front where he had been since the start of the Nazi offensive, carefully analyzed with Gen P. I. Brayko the shortcomings in the combat of aviation during the first day of battle, and took a new decision to make concentrated strikes against the large enemy groupings of tanks and infantry on the battlefield using a large number of bombers and assault planes covered by a mass of fighters. In the intervals between such strikes, there were to be continuous actions by small groups of assault planes and bombers.

Very little time remained for preparing the first concentrated strike which was to be made at the dawn of 6 July prior to the start of the attack by the German troops, but due to the efforts of the staff this was clearly organized. At 0500 hours the first to leave for the target were the bombers of the 6th Iak under the cover of fighters who had joined the bombers over their airfields. The bombers flew in regiment columns. After them the assault planes made a strong strike. As a total 450 aircraft were involved in the first concentrated strike. The strike was made against a large concentration of fascist tanks and motorized infantry in the region of Podolyan' and Soborovka. Here the bombers and assault planes used high explosive, fragmentation and antitank bombs.

For the fascists the appearance of such a large number of Soviet aircraft was unexpected. The effect of their strike exceeded all expectations. Scores of tanks remained burning on the battlefield and much other Nazi military equipment was destroyed. The enemy was able to resume the offensive in this sector only after 5 hours.

In the following hours the forces of the AA made two other such strikes, and between them the bombers and assault planes operated the entire day in squadron groups. The representative of Headquarters, Mar SU G. K. Zhukov, and the troop commander of the front, Gen K. K. Rokossovskiy, approved the actions of our aviation.

Our fighters began to provide more dependable cover for the troops against enemy air strikes. The patrolling areas were shifted beyond the front line, and this made it possible to intercept enemy aircraft prior to their approach to the battlefield. Clearer control was established from the command posts of the commanders of the 6th Iak and the 1st Guards Iad which

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were on the axis of the main strike close to the forward edge. At the same time the detail of fighter patrols in the air began to be strengthened, and they were promptly redirected to the basic groups of enemy bombers.

On 6 July, the flier of the 55th Guards iap, Jr Lt R. F. Polyanskiy, in a dogfight with two Fokker-Wulfs, having used up all his ammunition, in a frontal attack with a wing of his aircraft knocked off a wing of the enemy fighter and this dropped like a stone to the ground. Polyanskiy parachuted in the positions of our troops.

The pilots from the squadron of Capt N. M. Tregubov (the 721st iap) fought courageously, and during the day they destroyed six enemy aircraft. In April 1944, Capt N. M. Tregubov was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. By this time he had made 411 combat sorties, he had carried out 58 dogfights and had shot down 14 enemy aircraft personally and 3 in a group.

During the day the operations of the bombers and assault planes were given better coverage than before. Here the fighter pilots from the 127th iap headed by Capt F. V. Khimich distinguished themselves. The bombers covered by them carried out their missions without losses. Capt Khimich many other times emerged the victor in combat with fascist fliers and in October 1944 was awarded the Title of Hero of the Soviet Union for the 535 combat sorties made and the 15 enemy aircraft shot down.

On 6 July, the enemy aviation made 1,162 aircraft overflights in the zone of the Central Front. The fliers of the 16th AA made 1,326 combat sorties, they carried out 92 dogfights and shot down 113 enemy aircraft. The army lost 91 aircraft.

On 7 July, the fascist troops undertook still another series of attempts to break through our defenses in the region of Ponyrey. Enemy aviation made around 1,000 aircraft overflights.

The Soviet troops, in driving back the fierce attacks by large tank and infantry forces, held up the enemy drive. As on the day before, our aviation played an active role. On 7 July, after two unsuccessful attacks, the enemy concentrated up to 150 tanks, assault guns and large motorized infantry forces in the region of Ponyrey, preparing for a new strike against our troops. The air scouts promptly detected the enemy grouping. A heavy strike was made against it even in the initial position by our artillery and aviation (by the forces of 120 assault planes and bombers). According to the estimate of the troop commander of the Central Front, the enemy suffered enormous losses and its attack was halted.

Beginning with 7 July, a change occurred in the struggle for air superiority and the Soviet fighters seized the initiative. While during the first 2 days of air combat our losses had been somewhat less than enemy losses (the loss ratio was 1 to 1.2), during 7 and 8 July, the fliers of the AA shot down 185 enemy aircraft losing 89 during this.



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As on the preceding days, on 7 July, our fliers showed many examples of heroism, even to the point of self-sacrifice. The flier of the 874th shap, Jr Sgt A. S. Barnov, carried out an immortal feat. An enemy antiaircraft shell caught his aircraft over the target. The assault plane caught fire. Driven by sacred hate for the enemy, the courageous flier aimed the burning plane into the midst of the enemy tanks. A crew from the 243d shap, the pilot A. S. Cherezov and the gunner D. G. Uderman, also died heroically.

The squadron commander from the 282d iad, Sr Lt M. I. Vizhunov, in escorting our bombers, engaged several Fokker-Wulfs, and having used up all ammunition and in endeavoring to prevent the enemy fighters from reaching our bombers, rammed a fascist aircraft. Pilot Vizhunov perished in this combat. Friends buried him on the outskirts of the village of Vtoroye Korotayevo with military honors.

The fliers of just the 1st Guards iad during the day carried out 38 dog-fights and destroyed 28 enemy aircraft. The fliers of the 6th iak fought just as well. Headed by Maj P. P. Kizilov and Sr Lt N. G. Butoma, they successfully attacked large groups of enemy aircraft and caused them significant losses.

The assault plane pilots from the 2d Guards shad carried out the mission excellently. The squadrons of Maj A. P. Chukhayev and Capts A. A. Bondar', G. I. Kopayev and S. I. Vinnik destroyed 15 enemy tanks, 5 artillery batteries and much personnel. Effective results were also achieved by the assault planes from the 299th shad. Due to the skillful use of the anti-tank bombs, the pilots destroyed a large quantity of enemy equipment. Five assault planes led by Sr Lt D. I. Smirnov put 12 enemy tanks out of commission. Eight planes under the command of Capt K. Ye. Strashnyy in one pass destroyed 11 tanks and 4 motor vehicles. The groups of assault planes headed by Capt N. M. Karnaukhov destroyed and damaged 15 enemy tanks, 12 motor vehicles and 3 antiaircraft guns.

The squadron commanders Capt A. A. Bondar' and Sr Lt D. I. Smirnov in subsequent battles repeatedly showed examples of heroism and courage. In 1944, they were awarded the titles of Hero of the Soviet Union. Capt A. A. Bondar' on 28 October 1943 was killed in carrying out a mission and was awarded the title posthumously. He had carried out 241 combat sorties and had destroyed up to 70 enemy tanks, 250 motor vehicles, 6 enemy aircraft on the ground and 2 in the air. Sr Lt D. I. Smirnov had 90 combat sorties, and he had destroyed 37 enemy tanks, 76 motor vehicles, 20 guns and 6 airplanes at airfields.

On 7 July the army was reinforced with the 234th iad (the 133d, 233d and 248th iap) under the command of Col Ye. Z. Tatanashvili.

On 8 July the activeness of the enemy aviation declined somewhat (870 aircraft overflights were counted), obviously related to the great losses suffered in the preceding days and to the enormous tension.

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On 9 July, the enemy after heavy battles regrouped its forces. Its aviation even more reduced its activities, and in the zone of the Central Front only 314 aircraft overflights were counted. The fliers of the 16th AA carried out 920 combat sorties and conducted 50 dogfights during which they shot down 52 enemy aircraft. Our fighters continued to hold the initiative in the air.

By this time the control of the cover fighters for the troops had been well organized from the guidance posts. Thus, a group of fighters from the 1st Guards iad consisting of 15 Yak-1 under the command of Hero of the Soviet Union, Guards Capt V. N. Makarov, arrived in the area of Khmelevoye where the guidance radio of the division commander Lt Col I. V. Krupenin was located. Several minutes later up to 40 Me-110 aircraft appeared. Having received the command from the radio, Makarov's group unexpectedly attacked the fascist fliers. They chaotically dropped their bombload and withdraw from battle in a disorganized manner. At the same time to the north of Ol'khovatka several groups of Ju-87 and Ju-88 were detected, a total of up to 50 airplanes. Makarov's group was immediately sent to this area and attacked the enemy airplanes. As a result of the air combat, the enemy lost another five Ju-87, two Ju-88 and one FW-190. The remaining aircraft left the battlefield without dropping their bombs. The enemy bombers were not aided by their covering fighters.

The energetic actions of our fighters in a majority of instances prevented the fascist aviation from bombing our troops. The bombers were forced to increase the operating altitude to 4,000 meters, and as a consequence of this the effectiveness of the bombing was reduced.

On the morning of 10 July, the enemy focused all the efforts of its troops at the boundary area between our two armies (13th and 70th), in the direction of Verkhniy Lyubazh. The battles which ensued again assumed a fierce nature and were marked by the massing of enemy tank attacks and active aviation operations (950 aircraft overflights were counted). The last attempt of the enemy to break through along the Orel-Kursk highway was unsuccessful.

The air formations of the 16th AA on this day made concentrated and echeloned strikes against the enemy and covered our troops from the air. The actions of the fliers were effective and contributed largely to our troops in repelling the enemy tank and infantry attacks. About 1300 hours the units of the 3d bak, the 6th sak and the 2d Guards shad consisting of 171 bombers and 37 assault planes under a fighter cover made a heavy strike against the enemy and prevented an attack by strong enemy forces in the region of Kashar.

The command of the 2d Tank Army with great satisfaction commented on the good combat work of the aviators:

"To the commander of the 16th AA. During the day of 10 July, the aviation made a massed strike against a concentration of enemy tanks and infantry in the region to the north of Ponyrey. The tank troops observed the operations of our aces with excitement and express the great thanks of the tank

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troops to you. We are confident that our combat association will further accelerate the final victory over the enemy. Let us remind the enemy again of Stalingrad. Rodin, Latyshev." The combat report of the tank army stated that as a result of the air strike 54 enemy tanks had been set afire and hit.

On 11 July and in the first half of the following day, the enemy again undertook unsuccessful attacks with limited forces in the region of Ponyrey and in the direction of Degtyarnyy. Having encountered stubborn resistance from our troops which were supported by effective air operations, the enemy strike group lost its offensive force and by the end of 12 July had gone over to the defensive.

Only at a price of high losses and an enormous effort did the enemy succeed in the sector of the main strike of driving into our defenses in several places to a depth from 6-12 km during the period from 5 through 12 July.

During these difficult battles, our aviation carried out its duty. This is how the operations of the air formations of the 16th AA during these days were viewed by the command of the 13th Army where the Germans had made the main strike:

"To the commander of the 16th AA, Rudenko. The military council has asked that we pass on to the flight personnel warm thanks from our troops for the active support from the air in repelling the enemy. With affection and warmth the men have responded to the successful air strikes by their brothers in arms, the glorious aces of our front. We are firmly convinced that up to the end of the operation the fliers will courageously support the men of the 13th Army. Receive our comradely military greetings. Pukhov, Kozlov."

The air formations of the 16th AA during the period of the defensive battles from 5 through 12 July carried out about 7,600 combat sorties, they provided great help to the troops in stopping the enemy offensive and in coordination with the adjacent air armies won air superiority. During this time the pilots of the army carried out 380 air battles in which they shot down 517 enemy aircraft.

Around 20,000 high explosive and fragmentation bombs, more than 23,000 anti-tank bombs and around 4,000 rockets were dropped against the enemy.

The use by the fascist command of large infantry forces supported by a mass of aviation, tanks and artillery for an offensive on a narrow sector of the front required the organization on our side of concentrated bomber and assault plane strikes due to which many enemy attacks were prevented and heavy losses caused to the enemy.

In carrying out the concentrated strikes, from 150 to 450 aircraft were used (the cover fighters were 40-45 percent of them). This method of operations made it possible for the bomber and assault plane crews to

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operate in a comparatively calm situation, since the enemy antiaircraft fire was scattered over many groups of aircraft while the enemy fighters were unable to put up effective resistance to the mass of our bombers and assault planes covered by a large number of fighters. Our aviation could carry out precision bombing and effective firing on the targets with machine guns and cannons. The fighters more reliably covered its operations.

In carrying out concentrated strikes, in addition to the direct escort, if the situation required, strong fighter groups (20-30 aircraft in each) could be sent into the area of operations for 5-7 minutes to clear the air space of enemy fighters.

The air corps and divisions received their missions, as a rule, for the day, and made attacks considering the actions of the ground forces. The air regiments, in having preliminary orders indicating the area of operations and the time of the strike, prepared all the necessary crews ahead of time. Not long before take-off, the flight personnel was informed of the situation and received specific targets. The fliers waited for the take-off signal directly by their aircraft, and for this reason the taking off of an air regiment took not more than 10 minutes. The assembly of an air regiment was carried out while circling over the airfield. The air divisions assembled in the region of an airfield center with the subsequent passing through a checkpoint (KPP).

In the process of combat, the elements of fighter tactics were usually changed flexibly. As soon as it was clear that the enemy would endeavor to impede the operations of our bombers with a significant number of fighters, a decision was taken to form the battle formations of the covering fighters from three groups: the direct cover, the assault group and the free combat group. Such a formation proved fully effective for the fighters. For example, on 7 July, a group from the 774th iap consisting of 10 Yak-1 accompanied 7 aircraft from the 221st bad to the region of Podolyan. The fighter formation consisted of four of the direct cover under Lt I. A. Bondarev, a strike for and a free combat element under Sr Lt I. I. Romanenko. In the area of the target, they encountered up to 10 FW-190 and Me-109 which in elements were flying above the clouds. Having noticed that two elements of Fokker-Wulfs were closing in on the strike group, Romanenko, in taking cover in the cloudiness, suddenly attacked them and from a short range shot down one fascist fighter. The remainder disappeared into the clouds in a combat turn. Sr Lt Romanenko with his wingman Sgt P. I. Pshenov during this flight carried out two other dogfights. In acting decisively and skillfully, Romanenko shot down three enemy aircraft, and his wingman shot down one. The pilots of the strike group and the direct cover group destroyed three other Messerschmitts.

In February 1944, for 16 shot-down enemy aircraft Capt I. I. Romanenko was given the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. At present Maj Gen Avn I. I. Romanenko is the chief of the Higher Military Aviation School.

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The fighter formation during the covering of the assault planes consisted, as a rule, of two groups, the strike and the direct cover. In encountering superior forces of enemy fighters, our assault planes formed a closed circle and fought in close coordination with the cover fighters. A group of 6 Il-2 aircraft with good training of the pilots without any difficulty could form such a circle. With attacks by enemy fighters, the circle of assault planes moved to their own territory.

There were many examples of the successful fighting of assault planes in a defensive circle. On 9 July, two groups of Il-2 headed by the commander of the 78th Guards shap, Maj A. G. Nakonechnikov, in flying under the cover of fighters from the 283d iad, over the battlefield encountered up to 20 FW-190 and Me-109 which attacked the assault planes at the moment they were diving at the target. The gunners opened organized fire and drove off the enemy attack. Upon the command of Nakonechnikov the IIs reformed into a circle. The enemy fires made several other attacks against the assault planes, but, having lost three aircraft from their fire, withdrew from battle.

On the same day a group of 14 Il-2 headed by the commander of the 218th shap, the strafing sniper Maj N. K. Lysenko, under the cover of a group of La-5 from the 165th iap was to attack tanks and enemy personnel in the region of Ponyri. In the approach of the IIs to the target, the group of cover fighters was attacked by six FW-190. A dogfight ensued. During the attack on the target, 8 other FW-190 appeared over the assault planes. The assault planes formed a circle in moving to their own territory. The fascist fighters unsuccessfully endeavored to attack the IIs. In the defensive circle they reliably covered each other's tail. As a result of the combat, the enemy lost three aircraft and our assault planes had no losses. The prompt forming of a defensive circle by the assault planes and the high vigilance of the crews, their close interaction with the fighters and the correct control of the group provided success in combat.

The commanders of the 78th Guards and the 218th shap, Lt Col A. G. Kakonechnikov and Maj N. K. Lysenko, in 1944, were awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union for valor and heroism (the former had made 81 combat sorties, the latter had 115, having destroyed a large number of various military equipment and Nazis), as well as for outstanding leadership of combat by the air units under them.

The control of Soviet aviation in the course of the defensive engagement was concentrated in the hands of the commander of the AA, the command post of whom was located in a grove 25 km to the northeast of Kursk. The commanders of the air formations, in addition to their own permanent command posts, deployed forward command posts or had representatives with radios in the battle formations of the ground forces. In the main sector of army operations a VPU [auxiliary control point] was organized and this, as a rule, was headed by the deputy army commander, Gen M. M. Kosykh.

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During the decisive days of the engagement, the AA personnel showed high morale, a fervent hate for the enemy and an unbreakable belief in the victory of Soviet arms as well as unswervingsteadfastness and tenacity.

The battles in the air were fierce and wearing. But, regardless of the fatigue and significant losses, the fliers yearned for combat in order to defeat the enemy and take revenge for lost friends. The fighter pilots and assault pilots had to make up to five sorties a day. The nighttime rest of the flight personnel did not exceed 4-5 hours. From sunrise to sunset the fliers were at their airplanes at the airfield ready to take off when called. The technical personnel, working almost without sleep, made a maximum effort to ensure the most rapid and effective preparation of the aircraft for the subsequent sortie and for repairing the aircraft damaged in combat.

The men of the 16th AA were aware of what was in store for our motherland in the event that the Nazi command carried out its plans. For this reason all the personnel of the AA, in sparing no effort, fought like all the men on the front, not to life but to death.

Party political work during the days of the defensive engagement was very effective and to the point. The officer political workers mobilized the personnel of the army units to excellently carry out the missions of the command and to better support the combat activities of the unit. Meetings were held at the airfields before the combat sorties. The commanders, political workers, fliers and technicians spoke briefly at the meetings under unfurled colors of the units, in assuring the motherland and the party of their desire to more rapidly clear the homeland of the Nazi invaders.

The political workers, the party organizers, the Komsomol organizers and agitators made skillful use of the brief breaks between operations for agitation and propaganda.

The subject of the talks and information sessions was chiefly released from Sovinformbyuro [Soviet Information Bureau], as well as the successes and shortcomings in the combat activities of the unit's aviators during the day. The communists and Komsomol members were true proponents of party influence among the personnel of their unit.

In many party organizations of the subunits, party meetings were held at which they discussed the examples set by the communists in the carrying out of combat missions, in preparing the materiel and in carrying out other missions. The meetings were conducted in an active manner and served as an important means for indoctrinating and mobilizing the communists to carry out the combat missions.

The army newspaper had a great influence on indoctrinating the personnel. The description of characteristic combat episodes and heroic feats, individual articles and leaflets inspired hate for the enemy, they urged the soldiers to show heroism, courage and valor, and they glorified the might of our army. Examples of the exemplary fulfillment of combat missions were immediately made known to all the personnel.

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The political bodies and party organizations gave particular attention to joining the Communist Party and to the indoctrination of young communists.

During the period of the operation, work was also done to spread leaflets among enemy troops. Special aircraft were assigned for this. Leaflets were also dropped for Soviet citizens located on temporarily occupied territory, and from them they learned of the true situation on the fronts.

In the course of the defensive engagement on the Kursk Bulge, the 16th AA by its actions aided the troops of the front in halting the offensive by the Nazi troops.

Our fliers during this period won an intense battle for air superiority and for maintaining it, causing the enemy enormous losses, primarily in air combat. The strikes in May against enemy airfields somewhat weakened the force of German aviation, but by the beginning of their offensive on the Kursk Bulge the enemy had succeeded in making up the losses and had created a strong air grouping in this sector.

The significance of the air battles in the struggle for air superiority is well illustrated by the following figures. While in March-June 1943, the air formations of the 16th AA, as a result of strikes on enemy airfields, had destroyed and damaged 127 enemy aircraft, in the air battles Soviet pilots shot down 365 enemy aircraft.

Over the several days of the defensive engagement on the Kursk Bulge, around a thousand air battles were carried out involving the formations of three air armies (16th, 2d and 17th). In these battles the enemy lost 1,400 aircraft. Our losses were 1.5-fold less.<sup>1</sup>

The Air Army in the Counteroffensive of the Front

The troops of the Central Front, having ground down and bled the assault grouping of the enemy during the period of 8-day fierce defensive battles, by the middle of July 1943 were ready to go over to a counteroffensive.

The Soviet command had worked out ahead of time a plan for defeating the Orel enemy grouping. The plan envisaged the launching a powerful strikes by the forces of the Western, Bryansk and Central fronts.

The Orel grouping of Nazi troops, although suffering great losses in the first half of July, by the start of the counteroffensive of the troops of the Soviet Army still represented a great force. It was supported by the 6th Air Fleet which had 1,100 aircraft, including 600 bombers, 350 fighters

<sup>1</sup> See "Istoriya Velikoy Otechestvennoy Voyny Sovetskogo Soyuz 1941-1945" [History of the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union 1941-1945], Vol 3, Moscow, Voenizdat, 1964, p 401.

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and 150 reconnaissance planes. These were based basically at the Orel and Bryansk airfield centers. Moreover, bomber formations from airfields in the deep rear were also employed in this sector.

Our air force in the Orel sector (the 1st, 15th and 16th AA) had an almost triple superiority over the enemy.

The formations and units of the 16th AA, regardless of the significant losses which they had suffered in the defensive engagement, had not only maintained their battleworthiness, but had also increased this. The combat skill of the flight personnel had increased.

The youth had undergone its first combat lesson. The engineer and technical personnel had acquired experience in readying the materiel under the conditions of intense operations, and as a result the army each day had from 560 to 640 flying aircraft in its effective strength.

The counteroffensive by the Soviet troops against the Orel German grouping started with the forces of the Western and Bryansk fronts on 12 July on the northern and eastern faces of the Orel Salient, and this created favorable conditions for the development of the subsequent actions by the troops of the Central Front.

On 14 July, all the formations and units of the AA received the appeal from the Military Council of the Central Front. In the evening meetings were held in the air regiments. At them the military aviators vowed to the motherland, the party and the command to fight to the last drop of blood. At a meeting of the personnel of the 241st bad, a reply letter was approved to the military council of the front, and this letter stated: "We will bomb only excellently.... We will clear the Soviet land of the Nazi bandits."

On 15 July, after heavy artillery and air softening up, the troops of the Central Front went over to a counteroffensive in the Kromy sector.

In accord with the decision of the troop commander of the front, the commander of the 16th AA for the period of the counteroffensive gave the following missions to the air formations:

- 1) By bombing strikes to destroy enemy personnel and military equipment on the battlefield and deep in the defenses. This mission was entrusted to the bombers of the 241st and 301st bad to be covered by fighters from the 6th iak and to the bombers of the 221st bad supported by the 282d iad, as well as to the assault planes of the 2d Guards and 299th shad covered by fighters from the 283d and 286th iad. At night this mission was to be carried out by the forces of the 271st nbad;
- 2) To cover the battle formations of the advancing troops by the fighters of the 6th iak (the corps was to include the 1st Guards iad);



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3) To conduct reconnaissance with the forces of the 16th odrap and by the squadrons of the 283d and 286th iad.

With the start of the counteroffensive, the AA began to provide the troops of the front with effective air support. The air formations of the army on the first day of the counteroffensive made three concentrated strikes, each with the forces of from 300 to 400 aircraft and lasting 35-50 minutes against the forward edge of the enemy defenses, as well as against the tactical reserves and concentrations of tanks and personnel. Individual groups of assault planes and bombers operated between the strikes. On 15 July 1943, the AA made 1,002 sorties. By the end of the day the enemy had been driven out of its basic positions by our troops.

Enemy aviation, in suffering heavy losses in the preceding battles, did not show great activeness. Only 40 aircraft overflights were counted.

On 16 July, the enemy put up heavy resistance and in individual areas went over to counterattacks. Its aviation showed somewhat greater activity, and 234 aircraft overflights were counted.

On this day the AA was given the mission of preventing the bringing up of enemy reserves, destroying concentrations of tanks and personnel, and thwarting its counterattacks. For carrying out this mission, three concentrated strikes were made during the day. In the first (during the period of 1200-1300 hours), 410 aircraft were involved, including 155 bombers, 101 assault planes and 154 fighters. The second strike came 3 hours later. This involved 444 aircraft, including 140 bombers, 123 assault planes and 181 fighters. The third strike was made at 1900-2000 hours with a force of 460 aircraft, including 146 bombers, 126 assault planes and 188 fighters. Detached groups of bombers and assault planes operated in the intervals between the strikes. As a total during the day, 1713 sorties were made.

The troops of the front advanced somewhat and drove the enemy back from the lines along which it had endeavored to dig in.

On 17 July the enemy continued to put up stubborn resistance to our troops and went over to counterattacks. Enemy aviation endeavored to cover its troops and to bomb our battle formations. As a total 291 enemy aircraft overflights were counted.

For the purpose of thwarting counterattacks by German troops, for suppressing the centers of resistance and destroying their military equipment and personnel, the air formations of the 16th AA on this day made three strikes by large forces, and each of these involved at least 350 aircraft. In following up on the air strikes, our troops went over to the attack and successfully advanced.

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How the actions of our aviation were viewed can be seen from the response of the staff of the 3d Tank Corps. "The bomber and assault aviation of the 16th AA on 17 July made five concentrated and wave strikes in cooperation with the tanks against enemy troop accumulations. The troops have high praise for the operation of aviation and particularly the fighters which during the day provided reliable cover for the battle formations of the corps. Chief of staff of the 3d Tank Corps Col Devyatov."

As a total over the 3 days of the counteroffensive the AA carried out 4,478 sorties, it conducted 22 dogfights and shot down 28 enemy aircraft. Strong air support was provided to our troops.

On these days the Nazi troops were thrown back from the lines which they had occupied up to 5 July.

The initiative in the air over the combat area was firmly held by our fighters. In a majority of instances the enemy fighters in air engagements either suffered losses or did not engage in combat and retreated to their own territory.

On one of the combat days, the commander of the 163d iap, Lt Col P. A. Pologov, and the fliers Capt V. S. Bogatyrev and Sr Lts V. V. Makarov and Ya. I. Filimonov distinguished themselves. On the first sortie, this four-some was guided by the ground station to 8 FW-190 and 6 Ju-88. Having spotted the group of Fokker-Wulfs in a break in the clouds, Pologov dove sharply at the enemy. Having caught the enemy fighters by surprise they were forced to turn away. Pologov caught one Fokker-Wulf which was endeavoring to pull out of a dive, and from a short range shot it down. Using the same procedure Bogatyrev destroyed two fighters. At the same time Makarov shot down a fourth enemy aircraft when it was attempting to climb away. At the end of combat, Pologov, having noticed a retreating enemy bomber below, caught it and set it on fire with a burst from his cannon. As a total in this battle, 5 enemy aircraft were destroyed and 2 were hit. Pologov's group did not have any losses.

On the second sortie, Capt Bogatyrev and Sr Lt Makarov, in patrolling over the battlefield, saw a FW-190 which was heading toward our bomber. The enemy fighter was immediately shot down. During the fourth sortie, Sr Lt Filimonov shot down an enemy spotter plane.

In September 1943, Lt Col P. A. Pologov was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. At present he works in Sverdlovsk at one of the large plants.

In the battles over the Kursk Bulge, the flier from the 157th iap, Lt A. Ye. Borovykh, particularly distinguished himself. He showed great skill, courage and valor. During the days of the engagement he succeeded in shooting down 8 fascist aircraft. In August 1943, he was awarded the high title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

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In the battles over the Kursk Bulge, the flier from the 157th iap, Lt A. Ye. Borovykh, particularly distinguished himself. He showed great skill, courage and valor. During the days of the engagement he succeeded in shooting down 8 fascist aircraft. In August 1943, he was awarded the high title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

Andrey Yegorovich Gorovykh was born in 1921 in Kursk in a worker family. Prior to the war he worked as a driver in a motor pool. Having completed the Chuguyev Military Air School, he joined the active army in December 1941. In less than 2 years, Borovykh due to his outstanding military qualities, became the commander of an air squadron and at the same time joined the VKP(b). For new combat feats in February 1945, he received a second Gold Star and ended the war as a major in the position of the deputy commander of an air regiment.

After the war A. Ye. Borovykh completed the Red Banner Air Force Academy and later the Military Academy of the General Staff, and was the commander of an air division and held other high posts. At present Col Gen Avn A. Ye. Borovykh is the commander of the aviation of the National Air Defense Troops.

The commander of the bomber group of the 24th bap, the communist, Sr Lt A. I. Tenzin, showed enormous tenacity in the battle against the enemy. He was wounded before reaching the target, but this did not stop the courageous officer. In bleeding, he excellently carried out the mission and brought the group back to its airfield. The courageous flier was put up for a governmental decoration.

The young fliers from the 2d Guards shad attacked the enemy troops very courageously, showing true combat art in doing this. During the day many crews made four combat sorties. Jr Lt A. D. Solov'yev particularly distinguished himself. His comrades said: "Wherever the bombs fall from Solov'yev's airplane and wherever he fires from the cannons and machine guns, there are explosions, fire and death."

The commanders of the 157th iap, Maj V. F. Volkov, the 347th iap, Capt P. B. Dankevich, and the 519th iap, Maj K. N. Murga, proved to be exemplary combat indoctrinators of the flight personnel and able leaders of air battles from which their fliers always emerged the winners. In the subsequent battles for the motherland, Maj V. F. Volkov in July 1944 was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. He made 236 combat sorties, he carried out 59 air battles, and he personally shot down 15 enemy aircraft and 8 in a group. At present V. F. Volkov continues to serve in the Air Force. P. B. Dankevich for combat excellence was awarded many orders. At present he is a colonel general, and the deputy commander-in-chief of the Strategic Missile Troops.

The squadron commander of the 286th iad, Hero of the Soviet Union, Capt I.S. Kozich, also distinguished himself. In one of the air battles he emerged the victor from an unequal engagement, having shot down two German aircraft. Capt Kozich was one of the most experienced air scouts. He always

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took on the most difficult missions. His squadron was the best in the air division. Serving in it were many courageous scouts such as the deputy squadron commander Sr Lt A. P. Lipatov, the flight commander Lt B. I. Yakushev and Lts V. G. Semenov, D. N. Medvedev, and others.

During the days of the counteroffensive Hero of the Soviet Union the navigator of the 58th Guards shap, Maj V. M. Golubev, again won glory for expert attacks against fascist tanks. During the difficult battles for the Kursk Bulge he repeatedly led six assault planes into battle. In one sortie his group succeeded in destroying scores of enemy tanks. There was not a day when the Golubev six did not take off.

Victor Maksimovich Golubev was born in 1915 in Petrograd in a worker family. In 1936, he was inducted into the army and 3 years later completed the Khar'kov Military Aviation School. From the very first days of the war he was on the front. To the combat score of V. M. Golubev were 157 combat sorties, during which he destroyed and damaged 69 tanks, 875 motor vehicles, 10 fuel tanks, and much other military equipment, and also knocked out hundreds of enemy soldiers and officers. For valor and heroism V. M. Golubev in August 1943 was awarded the title of twice Hero of the Soviet Union. He perished on 17 May 1945 in carrying out his service duties.

On 19 July, the troops of the Central Front pierced the basic defensive line of the Nazi troops to the south of the population point of Kromy which had been organized by the Nazis in the spring. The enemy, in endeavoring not to allow the development of the breakthrough, threw its last reserves into battle.

The air formations of the 16th AA on this day continue to supply support to their troops. The bombers and assault planes, under a fighter cover, attacked enemy positions, in suppressing the artillery and centers of resistance, destroying personnel and equipment and disrupting control and communications. The fighters of the 6th iak covered the strike grouping of our troops. As a total during the day the army made 1,222 sorties.

Starting on 20 July, the enemy on the Kromy and other sectors, under the blows from our troops, began to pull back to the west and northwest, putting up stubborn resistance on the intermediate lines by counterattacks. On 5 August the troops of the Bryansk Front, with aid on the flanks from the troops of the Western and Central fronts, liberated Orel. In honor of this victory in Moscow the first artillery salute in the history of the Great Patriotic War was made. The summary of Sovinformbyuro stated that in the battles for the liberation of Orel, along with the troops of the front the air formations distinguished themselves, including those of Lt Gen Avr Rudenko. By 18 August, the troops of the Central and Bryansk fronts had driven the Nazis from the entire Orel Salient.

During this time the basic efforts of our aviation were focused on aiding the troops on the right wing of the front in developing the offensive and defeating the retreating Nazi troops.

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Enemy fighter aviation, although clearly inferior to the Soviet, on individual days appeared in the air in groups up to 12-16 aircraft.

Thus, on 25 July, a group of six Il-2 from the 229th shad under the command of Maj P. G. Plokhov and covered by five La-5 from the 721st iap headed by Capt N. M. Tregubov was attacking the retreating enemy troops. In coming out of the attack, the group was attacked by 10 FW-190. Then another 6 FW-190 appeared. The assault planes formed a circle and together with the covering fighters drove off the enemy attack for 20 minutes in moving to their own territory. As a result of the combat, two Fokker-Wulf were shot down and our losses were one La-5. The assault planes did not have any losses. The young flier, Jr Lt V. G. Smirnov, who had been shot down in combat after a certain time returned to his regiment. With an artificial lower limb he participated in the air battles in the Vistula-Oder and Berlin operations in a La-7 airplane.

Such an example of the manifestation of high patriotism in the 16th AA was not the only one. The flier from the 128th bap, Lt I. A. Malikov, lost a leg in combat. After recuperation in the hospital, through the intervention of the commander of the Air Force he was returned to his regiment. With an artificial leg, he first flew on a Po-2 and then remastered the Pe-2 bomber and ended the war near Berlin. He made 86 combat sorties and became a Hero of the Soviet Union.

The actions of the flight personnel in any, at times extremely difficult situation were permeated with the desire to carry out their military duty to the motherland regardless of the cost. Here is one such example.

On 4 August, in carrying out a mission in the region of Bryansk, a crew from the 57th bap consisting of Jr Lts A. M. Pogudin (pilot) and P. V. Parshutin (navigator), and the gunners Sgts Karas' and Kovalev was fired on by enemy antiaircraft artillery. The pilot Pogudin was severely wounded by shrapnel and having lost the possibility of controlling the aircraft, he ordered the crew to bail out and soon thereafter himself, covered with blood, bailed out. The uncontrolled aircraft spun out of control toward the ground.

Navigator Parshutin quickly realized that with the pilot out of commission not everything was lost for the crew. He ordered the gunner-radio operator Karas' to connect the controls in the required plug in the radio bay and to control the aircraft upon his commands. The gunner-radio operator, in precisely following the commands of the navigator, brought the aircraft into level flight and returned to Soviet territory. Without being able to lower the landing wheels, he did a belly-landing at the airfield. A fire broke out in the aircraft cockpit when it landed. Engr-Capt P. I. Parkhomenko and Tech Lts L. A. Shemyakin and I. G. Zaikin dashed to help. In working quickly and decisively they extinguished the fire and rescued the men and the aircraft.

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For the courage, boldness and commander-like self-control, the commander of the AA awarded the Order of the Red Banner to the navigator P. V. Parshutin and to the gunner-radio operator Karas', while the medal "For Valor" was presented to the gunner Kovalev. Engineer P. I. Parkhomenko and technicians L. A. Shemyakin and I. G. Zaikin were given watches. The courageous action of the crew and technical personnel was used as an example for all the personnel of the AA. Soon thereafter P. V. Parshutin was made a military pilot.

During the pursuit of the retreating enemy troops, the fighters of the 67th Guards IAP headed by the deputy squadron commander Sr Lt V. A. Latyshev repeatedly distinguished themselves. Thus, on 12 August the six fighters led by him during the covering of a river crossing received a radio command from the ground to intercept a group of Ju-88 aircraft. Latyshev ordered the holding force to engage the German fighters, and himself at the head of an assault foursome headed toward the bombers, he cut into the close formation and with the first burst shot down an enemy aircraft. His wingmen handled the other bombers successfully and they each destroyed one Junkers. As a result the formation of the bombers was broken up. They hurriedly dropped their bombs chaotically. The cover force operated with equal success. It did not allow the Fokker-Wulfs to reach the Soviet bombers. The Nazis lost four Ju-88 and four FV-190 in this battle.

On 14 August the command post of the 6th IAK was informed of the necessity of covering the advancing troops against enemy bombers. V. A. Latyshev immediately took up his squadron. After a short time the group had approached the front line. Coming at them was a formation of Ju-88 escorted by FV-190. Having split into two groups, our fighters attacked the Fokker-Wulfs and the bombers simultaneously. The enemy pilots returned to their territory without dropping the bombs. The advancing infantry congratulated the air heroes. After landing the pilots were read the thanks from the infantrymen and Gen Ye. Ye. Yerlykin who had observed their combat. In subsequent battles for the motherland, Sr Lt Latyshev distinguished himself many other times. In 1944 he was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union for carrying out 232 combat sorties and for destroying 17 enemy aircraft in battles. At present Sr Lt (Res) V. A. Latyshev is working in Moscow.

During the period from 13 July through 15 August 1943, the air formations of the AA made over 22,000 combat sorties, including over 13,800 for bombing and strafing enemy troops and operations against enemy rail movements, up to 2,000 for covering their own troops, around 4,200 for escorting bombers and assault planes, and up to 2,000 sorties for reconnaissance. In 425 air battles, up to 400 enemy aircraft were shot down.<sup>1</sup>

As a result of the bombing and strafing attacks, the enemy lost a large number of tanks, motor vehicles and guns as well as several thousand soldiers and officers.

<sup>1</sup> Arkhiv MO SSSR, folio 368, inv. 6476, file 102, sheets 6, 41.

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As a whole the 16th AA carried out its missions in supporting the troops of the Central Front during the counteroffensive on the Kursk Bulge. In actively countering the enemy from the air, the air formations of the AA aided the troops in crushing the Orel German grouping. Our aviation completely captured the initiative in the air. The enemy Luftwaffe, in suffering high losses, clearly lost its former air superiority and was unable to recover it subsequently.

In the summer of 1943, the 16th AA began to use heavy concentrated strikes against the enemy troops involving 300-400 aircraft ever more widely. The effectiveness of such strikes, in comparison with actions in small groups, was immeasurably higher while losses were much fewer. Thus, during the actions in the period of the counteroffensive in small groups, the losses in the army per 300 sorties reached an average of 20 aircraft, while with strikes in large forces the losses were 3-3.5-fold less. The ability to organize and carry out heavy strikes showed the high skills of the flight and technical personnel, the increase in the organizational skill and tactical maturity of the commanders, as well as a further improvement in operational art and tactics of the Soviet Air Force.

The fighter coverage for the troops on the battlefield also became more perfect and effective. The previously employed scheduled patrolling with a small number of crews during all the daylight hours, without considering the air situation at the given moment, did not prove effective in this operation. The appearance of even a large patrol (of 20-30 aircraft) could not always have an impact on enemy air operations. Only a warning system employing enemy aircraft detection radars with the basing of the fighters at forward airfields connected by radio with the command post of the commander who was on the front line, an excellent knowledge of the situation, a broader use of "free search" over enemy territory, clear control and re-targeting of the patrols to more important groups of enemy aviation and the prompt increasing of forces in combat made it possible to carry out the mission of providing troop cover more successfully.

"As a result of the Battle of Kursk the German Air Force was dealt a new crushing blow. Over the 50 days of continuous intense battles, the Soviet fliers destroyed over 3,700 enemy aircraft. Nazi aviation was finally deprived of strategic air superiority which it had held since the outset of the war. The initiative in the air went completely to Soviet aviation."<sup>1</sup>

Heading Toward Kiev

Proceeding from the overall plan for the liberation of the left-bank Ukraine, Headquarters on 16 August 1943 ordered the Central Front to reach the line of Trubchevsk, Shostka and Ryl'sk by no later than 1-3 September. Subsequently the offensive was to be developed on the Konotop--Kiev axis.

<sup>1</sup>"Istoriya Velikoy Otechestvennoy Voyny Sovetskogo Soyuza 1941-1945."

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The unleashing of the main strike was planned on the Novgorod-Severskiy sector, and was entrusted to the troops of the 65th and 2d Tank armies. The basic efforts of the aviation were to be aimed at supporting them. The staff of the 16th AA, jointly with the staffs of the advancing armies, worked out a plan of coordination in breaking through the enemy defenses and in developing the success, as well as in bringing the tank army into the break and the support of its operations in the breakthrough area. For this purpose, the 3d Tank and 7th Mechanized corps were assigned one shap each from the 2d Guards and 299th shad. The representatives of these regiments were sent with radios to the corps staffs where all the remaining questions of cooperation were worked out in detail. The cover for the troops on the main sector was entrusted to the 6th iak.

By the start of this operation, the fighting force of the 16th AA included 740 aircraft, with 183 daytime bombers, 130 night bombers, 150 assault planes, 263 fighters and 14 reconnaissance planes.

The liberation of the left-bank Ukraine in the zone of the middle courses of the Dnepr was assigned to the troops of the Central, Voronezh and Steppe fronts, the fighting strength of which included the 16th, 2d and 5th AA which had 1,450 airplanes. In this area the Germans had 900 aircraft. Thus, our aviation surpassed that of the Nazis.

On 26 August, the troops on the left wing of the Central Front went over to the offensive. Immediately after artillery softening up, at 0840 hours, our aviation made a heavy strike involving 407 bombers and assault planes under a fighter cover against objectives on the battlefield and deep in the enemy defenses for the purpose of destroying the staffs and disrupting control, suppressing the artillery and hitting personnel and military equipment. During the day two other concentrated strikes were made: at 1300 hours with the forces of 331 aircraft and at 1625 hours involving 290 aircraft. In the intervals between these, sorties were made by individual groups to strafe the enemy troops. By the end of the day the troops of the front with active support from the aviation had pierced the enemy defenses.

On the first day of the offensive, the 16th AA made 1,540 sorties, including 963 to bomb and strafe the enemy troops.

In the following days the enemy began rapidly to bring up reserves and repeatedly went over to counterattacks. The struggle assumed a fierce nature. On 27 August, the 2d Tank Army in cooperation with formations from the 65th Army, captured the city of Sevsk. On 27 and 28 August, the air formations of the army by concentrated and wave strikes by assault planes and bombers directly ahead of the advancing troops of the front and deep in the enemy positions destroyed enemy personnel and military equipment and also prevented the bringing up of reserves to the front. The air formations of the army during these days provided tangible support to our troops, as can be seen from the following response:



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"To the commander of the 16th AA, Lt Gen Avn Rudenko. During this period of the heavy offensive battles to capture Sevsk and to crush the Nazi troops which had been brought up from the rear and were fighting opposite the 2d Tank Army, we received great help from our aces. The prompt and heavy strikes by the assault planes and bombers helped us thwart the enemy's plans. On behalf of the tank troops, the military council thanks you, your immediate assistant, the chief of staff Maj Gen Avn Brayko, the commanders of the formations and the flight and technical personnel. Commander of the 2d Tank Army Lt Gen Bogdanov, member of the military council Maj Gen Latyshev and chief of staff Maj Gen Preysman."

The aviation supported our troops also in repelling enemy counterattacks. Thus, another document from the commander of the 2d Tank Army states: "The strong strafing attacks by our aviation against the counterattacking infantry with tanks in the regions of Zaul'ye, Chemlyzh, Krostovka and Borisovo on 27 and 28 August assisted largely in repelling the enemy counterattacks."

The following response also shows the effective operations of the assault planes of the 299th shad: "As a result of the successful air raids, a significant quantity of enemy batteries, individual guns and machine guns was suppressed, and this ensured the capturing of the defensive zone, the population points of Mikhaylovskiy, Pushkinskiy and the defensive strong-point at elevation 215.4 by the division. The division, due to air support, advanced. The aviation suppressed at least 10 enemy artillery and mortar batteries and 3 antiaircraft batteries and destroyed and scattered up to 2 infantry battalions. The response of the infantry to the actions of the assault aviation has been outstanding. The infantrymen, tank troops and artillery troops thank our aces for the excellent support. The personnel of the 149th Rifle Division sends warm greetings to all the personnel of the 299th shad. Commander of the 149th Rifle Division Col Orlov, chief of staff Lt Col Smigin."

From 20 through 31 August, the fliers of the 16th AA carried out 6,153 sorties, they engaged in 48 air battles and shot down 53 enemy aircraft.

By the end of the month, on the sector of the main strike of Novgorod and Sevsk, our troops, having encountered stubborn enemy resistance, after the capturing of Sevsk, advanced just 20-25 km; to the south of Sevsk the troops of the 60th Army advanced 60 km in a southwesterly direction, having broadened the front of the breakthrough up to 100 km. In line with this success, the troops of the Central Front, having regrouped the basic forces to the left wing, carried out a counteroffensive against Konotop.

The main efforts of the 16th AA in this sector were concentrated on providing a cover for the advancing troops of the front and aiding them by bombing and strafing attacks, particularly in the crossing of the Desna, Seym and the Dnepr rivers, in destroying the crossings and carrying out reconnaissance.

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The struggle against the enemy aviation was carried out basically in the air, but attacks were also made against airfields. Thus, on 3 September there was a successful raid by two groups of nine from the 221st IAD against the Konotop airfield where ten enemy aircraft were destroyed and nine damaged.

In cooperating with the ground forces, the 16th AA at the start of September made strikes against the retreating Nazi troops on roads and crossings over rivers as well as against centers of resistance. With the necessity of repelling enemy counterstrikes, the air formations made concentrated strikes involving from 100 to 160 aircraft. Thus, on 5 September a heavy strike was made against the units of the 2d German Tank Army which were preparing a counterattack in the region of Konotop, and as a result of this the enemy lost up to 100 motor vehicles, 3 tanks and 32 guns.

The battles for the liberation of Bakhmach were particularly fierce; here the enemy put up stubborn resistance. The bombers and assault planes from the army made very effective strikes against the strongpoints and concentrations of Nazi troops. On 9 September our troops liberated this city.

In the air the most stubborn battles occurred during the period of defeating the Nezhin enemy grouping which was covering the approaches to Kiev. Here the enemy somewhat reinforced its aviation grouping. Its bombers by actions against the advancing troops and the rear of the front endeavored to retard the pace of the offensive, but our fighters reliably covered the troops. The strikes by the assault planes and bombers helped the troops crush the enemy grouping and to capture the town of Nezhin on 15 September.

In developing a further offensive, the troops of the left wing of the Central Front on 19 September crossed the Desna and 2 days later liberated Chernigov.

The air divisions which particularly distinguished themselves in battle by an order of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief were awarded honorary names: Bakhmach for the 221st IAD (commander, Col S. F. Buzylev); Nezhin for the 299th IAD (commander, Col I. V. Krupskiy) and the 286th IAD (commander, Col I. I. Ivanov); Chernigov to the 2d Guards IAD (commander, Col G. O. Komarov).

The offensive by the troops of the Central Front continue to develop rapidly. On 22 September, they emerged to the north of the mouth of the Pripyat' River into the Dnepr and from a march formation began to cross this major water barrier with air and artillery support. By nightfall our units had captured a bridgehead and subsequently fought to broaden it.

In the struggle to retain and broaden the bridgeheads, the formations of the 16th AA bombed and strafed the counterattacking enemy troops, while the fighters repelled raids by its aviation. Here are several examples.

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On 14 September four La-5 from the 6th iak were covering the advancing troops on the battlefield. The group was led by the Irkut Jr Lt A. P. Soluyanov. Fighting with him in the element was his younger brother Aleksandr. The second element was comprised of Lt V. M. Viklyayev and Jr Lt I. A. Yegorov. Having encountered four FV-190, the Soluyanov brothers quickly attacked them. One Nazi was shot down by the younger Soluyanov, after which the enemy took cover. Soon thereafter the fliers saw up to 25 Ju-87 under the cover of a large number of fighters and these were heading to bomb our troops. The four Soviet fighters immediately dashed into the attack and began a battle which lasted 20 minutes. The Lavrochkins emerged the winners. The enemy bombers did not succeed in carrying out their mission. They dropped their bombs without aiming and returned to their own territory. In this battle the four Soviet planes shot down three Junkers and three Fokker-Wulfs.

The battle score of the four valorous aces rose day after day. During the summer offensive battles the Soluyanov brothers, Vikhlyayev and Yegorov carried out 31 air battles and shot down 24 fascist aircraft. In the course of these battles Lt Vikhlyayev destroyed 8 enemy aircraft, the Soluyanov brothers bagged 10 and Jr Lt Yegorov 6.

On 20 September, four Yak-9 under the command of Sr Lt L. K. Ryzhiy took off to cover our troops in the region of Kozelets. Soon Ryzhiy spotted three groups of Ju-88. Having given the command for the leader of the other element Lt V. M. Oganessov to attack the second group of bombers, he rapidly attacked the second group of Junkers and from a short range with cannon fire set a bomber on fire which exploded in the air. The explosion also damaged the wing of Ryzhiy's aircraft, however he, in continuing the battle, covered his wingman and ensured his destruction of another enemy aircraft. The Oganessov element attacked the second group of Ju-88 and also shot down two enemy bombers. The remaining enemy aircraft returned to their territory.

On 21 September four La-5 from the 279th iad headed by Lt M. Ye. Kirilkin were covering our troops. Two groups of Ju-88 appeared over the front line at an altitude of 4,000 meters. Our four, having climbed to 4,500 meters and approaching from the direction of the sun attacked the enemy. The element of Lt Kirilkin attacked the first group, and the element of Lt A. P. Kononov, the second. As a result of the bold and rapid attacks, each element shot down one Junkers and the remainder retreated to the west at full speed.

During the period of the offensive, the assault planes also operated very efficiently. The 2d Guards and the 299th shad under the cover of the 283d and 286th iad in groups of 6-8 aircraft destroyed the counterattacking Nazi troops, they assisted the infantry in crossing rivers, and also disrupted enemy movements, in impeding the evacuation and the bringing up of reserves.

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On 6 October, by fierce counterattacks, the fascists endeavored to push back our units which had crossed the Desna and dug in on its right bank. Stubborn battles commenced with morning. Squadrons of assault planes took off from the airfields to aid the infantry. The first six Il-2 was led by one of the most experienced fliers from the 299th shad, Capt V. I. Seliverstov. Regardless of the fog and the rain, the crews reached the target accurately. The assault planes made a bombing strike, and then from a dive fired on the Nazis with machine gun and cannon fire. Our fliers acted with great skill. In one sortie Seliverstov's group destroyed 7 guns, 10 motor vehicles and eliminated many enemy soldiers. On this day our aircraft appeared continuously over the battlefield, in wave after wave. Due to the support from the assault planes, the Soviet troops, having repelled all the enemy counterattacks, not only firmly dug in on the bridgehead, but also went over to an offensive and occupied several population points.

During these days the bombers operated just as effectively and efficiently. The air divisions of the 3d bak and the 6th sak in attacking the retreating enemy columns and troop concentrations destroyed enemy personnel and equipment, they attacked the railroad junctions and stations of Novozybkov, Novgorod-Severskiy, Bakhmach and Vorozhba, and also destroyed the crossings over the Desna, Selym and Dnepr rivers and annihilated enemy aircraft at the Konotop and Novozybkov airfields.

The bombers of the 271st nbad, in operating at night, destroyed the retreating enemy columns on the roads, they bombed the railroad junctions of Bakhmach and Konotop, and attacked the crossings over the Desna in the area of Novgorod-Severskiy and Vitemlya. Moreover, the night bombers transported ammunition to the Dnepr bridgeheads for the troops of the 13th Army.

Air reconnaissance was carried out during the day and at night. It followed the retreating enemy troops, the bringing up of the reserves and the basing of enemy aviation.

As a total during the period from 16 August through 15 October, the air formations of the 16th AA made 20,000 sorties, they carried out 350 air battles, and shot down 336 enemy aircraft. Our losses were significantly less.

The bombing and assault strike by the aviation destroyed and damaged up to 160 tanks, 19 aircraft, 3,000 motor vehicles, over 770 guns and mortars, and over 13,000 enemy soldiers and officers were killed.<sup>1</sup>

During the period of the rapid offensive from Sevsk to the Dnepr, the air army encountered significant difficulties in control and rear support due to the frequent rebasing of the air formations. The command post of the air army also changed its place among with them. Regardless of this, the

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<sup>1</sup> Arkhiv MO SSSR, folio 368, inv. 6476, file 102, sheets 44, 60-61, 88-89.

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control of the air formations and units in the AA was not interrupted due to the unstinting work by the personnel of the army signal units. The command post of the AA had direct telegraph as well as radio communications with the air formations. Communications with the staff of the front was maintained over the ST-35. Communications with the combined-arms armies was maintained through the communications center of the front, and before the carrying out of the offensive operation direct communication was established with the 65th and 48th armies through the ST-35. Contact with the staff of the Red Army Air Force was carried out by Baudot transmitter and by radio. Contact with adjacent air armies was maintained by radio. Moreover, telephone communications operated dependably with the staffs of the Red Army Air Force, the front and the staffs of the combined-arms armies.

The AA received the missions for each stage of the operation with an indication of the targets and the time of operations from the command of the troops of the front. In accord with this the army staff worked out an operations plan, the forces, means and methods of the strikes were determined, and this was immediately passed on to the command of the combined-arms armies in the area of which our aviation was to operate.

The high pace of the offensive required the immediate construction of airfields on the liberated territory after the occupying of the fields by our forces. All five airfield engineering battalions existing in the army were engaged in preparing the airfields. For the first time in practice landing strips had to be built on stubble after harvesting. The airfields abandoned by the enemy, as a rule, had been rendered unserviceable by plowing up, mining and the blowing up of the landing strips.

The times for readying the airfields were maximally reduced to 1-3 days. The airfield engineering battalions readied only the flying fields while all the equipment of the airfields (dugouts, shelters and command posts) was built by the forces of the bao.

In the course of the offensive operation, the supplies of ammunition and fuel were greatly reduced and rarely exceeded a 4- or 5-day supply. The shortage of essential supplies, the daily consumption of them and the length of the lines of communications--all of this often created very acute situations. In the new base areas until the reconstruction of the railroads aviation was supplied by motor transport from the supplies of the Kursk center.

The aviation engineering service of the AA during the period of the offensive carried out extensive work to minimize the time required to ready the aircraft for combat sorties, and particularly repeated sorties.

Along with this, the engineering and technical personnel of the air units and the field repair bodies did enormous work to rebuild the nonworking and damaged materiel. In August alone, several hundred aircraft and motors were put back into service.

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In the work of the engineering and technical personnel of the AA there was a constant desire to ready the materiel in the shortest time and with maximum reliability. Thus, Tech Lt of the 24th bap D. I. Zadorozhnyy with a group of three men repaired a bomber in 3 hours, while at that time a day was needed for its repairs. The technical personnel of the 2d Guards shad during these days showed exceptional tenacity and endeavor. For example, the aircraft mechanic communist V. I. Mordvintsev on 20 July serviced 16 sorties; the electrician V. S. Ananich, and the ordnancemen Komsomol members A. N. Yakovlev, I. K. Rudenko and communist V. B. Shirkevich worked excellently.

Once a Pe-2 aircraft from the 3d bak was hit in carrying out a mission. Having flown back across the front line, the bomber made a belly-landing in a field. The damage sustained in combat and in landing was so serious that the plan was to be written off. However Sr Tech Lt M. M. Mogil'nyy, after inspecting the aircraft, set to work to rebuild it. With the help of just one mechanic in several days and nights of constant work he replaced the motor and a number of other parts and returned the bomber to combat. For this he was awarded the Order of the Red Star.

## Below--Belorussia

As a result of the successful conclusion of the offensive by our troops from Sevsk to the Dnepr, favorable conditions were created for undertaking new operations to liberate the eastern regions of Belorussia.

On 15 October, the troops of the front, with air support, began an operation on the Loyev sector to cross the Dnepr and seize a bridgehead on its western bank.

On the eve of the offensive by our troops, the bombers from the 3d bak made heavy strikes against the enemy's defensive strongpoints and the railroad junction of Gomel'. As a result of the concentrated strike by three regimental groups of the 241st bad which were led by the commanders of the 24th and 128th bap, Lt Cols A. I. Sokolov and Hero of the Soviet Union M. M. Voronkov, as well as by the deputy division commander Lt Col A. G. Fedorov, several troop trains and station equipment were destroyed at the railroad junction and numerous explosions and fires occurred. The operations of the bombers were supported by fighters from the 1st Guards iad.

Having successfully crossed the Dnepr and captured the strongpoint of Loyev on the following day, the troops of the front began advancing on the axis of Rechitsa, and by the end of October, having significantly broadened the bridgehead, reached a line 20 km to the west of the Dnepr.

During this period, the 16th AA, in supporting the troops of the front, by using concentrated bomber and assault plane strikes destroyed enemy personnel, weapons and strongpoints in the piercing of enemy defenses and in the crossing of rivers. In the intervals between the strikes, the assault

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planes operated in small groups, in escorting our mobile troops which had been thrown into the breach. Fighters covered the troops on the battlefield as well as our bombers and assault planes, objectives of the immediate rear and primarily the crossings over the Dnepr and the Sozh, and they also reconnoitered the enemy.

Here is how the command of the 18th and 27th Rifle corps judged the operations of the 299th shad on 15-17 October:

"With the start of the softening up process and the crossing of the Dnepr by the first landing detachments, the assault aviation, in coordinating with the troops, made accurately timed strikes against the main enemy strongpoints, as well as against concentrations of personnel and their immediate reserves. The assault planes, in making several passes at a target, fired on the enemy infantry and made it hit the dirt, in providing great aid to the 69th Rifle Division. As a result, units of the division with minimum losses crossed the Dnepr and seized a bridgehead for a further offensive, they extended it and captured a number of population points. The enemy on the first day was unable to undertake a single counterattack. The personnel from the units of the 18th Rifle Corps noted the high ability of the fliers from the 299th shad and thank them for outstanding actions and the aid provided during the crossing of the Dnepr and the piercing of the enemy defensive line. Commander of the 18th Rifle Corps Maj Gen Ivanov, chief of staff Lt Col Rossinskiy."

"The 27th Rifle Corps under difficult conditions crossed the Dnepr and seized a bridgehead on its western bank. The success of the corps was largely aided by the 299th shad. The good interaction and the bold and decisive attacks by the pilots made it possible for the infantry to carry out the set missions with less blood. The teamwork of the crews and the officers who organized good coordination with the infantry created the prerequisites for the success of the corps troops. The soldiers and officers of the infantry express their gratitude to the assault pilots who routed the enemy for military cooperation and combat help. Commander of the 27th Rifle Corps Maj Gen Cherkmanov, chief of staff Col Yerevin."

In all instances the bombers and assault planes as well as the fighters covering them had to remain as long as possible over the target. The assault planes, as a rule, made four-six passes. The covering fighters in the instance of the absence of enemy fighters in the target area also strafed the enemy troops.

On 18 October, in the region of Mokhovo, two groups of six Il-2 from the 431st shap led by the squadron commanders Capt I. A. Lozenko and Sr Lt N. S. Latskov, under the cover of fighters from the 286th iad attacked an enemy column numbering up to a thousand men. As a result of the attack, it was crushed and it lost over half its personnel in casualties. Capt I. A. Lozenko in December 1943 in his 155th combat sortie died a death of the brave and posthumously was awarded the Gold Star of a Hero of the



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Soviet Union and the Order of Lenin. Sr Lt N. S. Latskov was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union in October 1944. By this time he had 112 combat sorties. At present he is a reserve colonel and works in a scientific research institution.

On 20 October 1943, the Central Front was renamed Belorussian by a decision of Headquarters.

The air support for the ground forces in the carrying out of their combat missions became ordinary and necessary not only in conducting the operations but also during periods of comparative quiet. On 31 October the enemy with forces of up to an infantry battalion with tank support counter-attacked our units near the population point of Lipnyaki. Upon the request of the commander of the 65th Army a group of six IIs was sent to the battlefield. Having arrived on time, in several passes it made an attack on the enemy which, in essence, predetermined the outcome of the started battle. The enemy counterattack was successfully driven off.

On 11-13 November, the troops of the Belorussian Front broke the enemy defenses to the north of Loyev and in pursuing the enemy in a northwesterly direction, on 18 November captured the town of Rechitsa, simultaneously reaching the Berezina River.

In the battles for the liberation of Rechitsa, the assault planes of the 2d Guards shad (commander Col G. O. Komarov), the bombers of the 241st bad (commander, Lt Col A. G. Fedorov) and the night bombers of the 271st nbad (commander, Col M. Kh. Borisenko) distinguished themselves; by an order of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief these units were given the honorary names of Rechitsa.

Having captured the town of Rechitsa and reaching the Berezina, our troops threatened the Gomel' German grouping with encirclement. Simultaneously the troops of the front went over to the offensive on the right wing in the region of Propoysk, they broke the enemy defenses and on 26 November liberated Gomel' by a gold enveloping maneuver. By the end of the month our troops had reached the Dnepr in this sector.

The aviation played a major role in the successful offensive by the troops in the Gomel' sector. It made concentrated strikes in the piercing of the enemy defenses, in the crossing of rivers and repelling counter-strikes, it continuously attacked the enemy with bomber and assault plane groups, and also dependably covered the troops of the front.

Particularly effective in terms of the results were the concentrated strikes made by our aviation in the middle of November in the regions of Prokopovich, Kostyukovka and Yeremino, where the Nazi troops were caused very significant losses. These strikes involved from 180 to 320 aircraft. There were three such strikes on 12 November, two on 19 November and four on 22 November.

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By an order of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of 26 November, the following units were commended as particularly distinguishing themselves in the liberation of the city of Gomel': The 301st iad (commander, Col F. M. Fedorenko), the 273d iad (commander, Col I. Ye. Fedorov) and the 282d iad (commander, Col Yu. M. Berkal'). They were given the honorary names of Gomel'. The 299th shad (commander, Col I. V. Krupskiy) and the 286th iad (commander, Col I. I. Ivanov) received the Order of the Red Banner.

Subsequently the operations of the 16th AA played a major role in assisting the troops of the Belorussian Front in the operations of the winter period of 1943-1944. Regardless of the poor weather conditions in December, the AA as before employed concentrated strikes in piercing the enemy defenses. Thus, on 15 December two strikes were made with 215 and 260 aircraft.

The personnel acted courageously and unstintingly in carrying out the missions. The military skill of the fliers had increased noticeably, particularly among the young fliers who first saw combat in the summer. The air battles began to be carried out on a significantly more organized level. The army veterans remember many examples when our fliers were victorious over the enemy not in numbers but in skill.

On 6 October, four Yak-9 from the 273d iad led by Capt Volynkin were covering the troops in the region of Chernobyl'. While on patrol the group encountered eight Ju-87 under the cover of seven FW-190. Volynkin with his wingman attacked the enemy fighters and in the ensuing battle shot down two of them, while the other element turned against the bombers. Jr Lt Kondrashev succeeded in destroying a Junkers. This battle particularly showed the flying skills of the elements which, in skillfully mastering fire and maneuvering, with a numerically superior enemy, shot down three aircraft.

On 16 October, a foursome of Yak-9 from the 248th iap headed by Sr Lt Nechipurenko in the region of Loyev engaged four FW-190. Under equal conditions, our fliers emerged the victors from the combat. Due to the precise interaction between the elements and in the element, and because of able maneuvering and accurate firing, they shot down three enemy fighters and returned to their airfield without losses.

Particularly noteworthy and instructive was the air battle conducted on 3 November by the assistant commander of the 519th iap, Sr Lt V. A. Bashkirov, when he, in ferrying a Yak-7 aircraft to another airfield and carrying an aircraft mechanic in the fuselage compartment behind the pilot's protective plate, encountered a Ju-88. Obviously it was a reconnaissance plane. Bashkirov decided to attack the enemy and engaged it. The fascist endeavored to escape by diving, but he was caught by the Soviet fighter. At an altitude of 100 meters the Junkers caught fire and then crashed into the ground.

In pulling out of the attack, suddenly two elements of FW-190 dove on Bashkirov. One of them was somewhat below and our flier was able to get him in the sight. In an instant the Fokker-Wulf, in leaving a trail of

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smoke, was diving toward the ground. In the meantime the second element of enemy fighters went into the attack. It was difficult for the Soviet pilot on the overloaded aircraft to carry out the unequal battle with the Nazi vultures. However, the high skills, valor and daring helped him escape from the difficult situation. Bashkirov reduced his speed and allowed the attacking fighter to move in front of him and then opened fire from the cannon. The enemy aircraft caught fire. In order to put out the flames, the German turned sharply and unexpectedly collided with his partner. Both aircraft exploded in the air from the impact. Thus ended the duel of Viktor Bashkirov, in the course of which the enemy was deprived of four aircraft.

V. A. Bashkirov was born in 1920 in a worker family. Prior to the army he worked as a lathe operator at a plant in Vladimiri. In May 1941 he completed flight school and soon thereafter began to fight the fascists. During the war communist Bashkirov carried out 281 combat sorties, he engaged in 35 air battles, and personally shot down 19 enemy aircraft. In February 1944, he was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. Presently Col (Res) V. A. Bashkirov, in being the deputy chairman of the Chernigovskaya Oblast DOSAAF Committee, carries out extensive social work in indoctrinating the youth in the military traditions of the heroes of the Great Patriotic War.

On 23 December, in the region of Antinovka, at an altitude of 1,000 meters, a group of six La-5 from the 721st iap headed by Sr Lt V. M. Zhmulin, in covering eight Il-2 from the 299th shad, encountered six FW-190 which endeavored to attack the assault planes. The IIs formed a defensive circle. Our fighters imposed battle on the enemy fliers in a vortical maneuver, drawing the enemy up. As a result of the combat, fliers I. G. Pronyakov and A. S. Kobisskoy shot down one Fokker-Wulf each. Our assault planes did not have any losses. Sr Lt A. S. Kobisskoy in July 1944 was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. By that time he had 314 combat sorties, and in 47 air battles had shot down 16 fascist aircraft.

As a total during the period of combat from 15 October through 31 December 1943, the 16th AA carried out around 14,800 combat sorties and engaged in 270 air battles, having destroyed 198 enemy aircraft. The losses of our aviation were significantly fewer.

As a result of the offensive in the Gomel'-Bobruysk sector, the troops of the Belorussian Front crossed the Sozh River, and on the left wing they had crossed the Dnepr, and having advanced 130 km, had liberated a significant portion of Belorussian territory, having occupied an advantageous position for encircling the enemy grouping.

On 2 January 1944, the Belorussian Front received a new mission, to start an offensive with the left wing, to crush the Mozyr' enemy grouping, and subsequently to advance on Bobruysk.

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The air formations of the 16th AA, in preparing for the operation, were to disrupt the operations of the Kalinkovich railroad junction, the station and tracks, in destroying concentrations of troops trains. With the start of the offensive (from 8 January), it was to assist the troops of the front in piercing the enemy defenses, to prevent the bringing up of reserves and the retreat of enemy troops from the region of Kalinkovich and Mozyr'. The fighters were to provide reliable cover for the troops of the front and the operations of our aviation.

In January 1944, the weather situation was extremely bad (frequent snowfalls, low cloudiness and fogs). For this reason the predominant tactical procedure for the actions of the bombers and assault planes was wave attacks in small groups. However under favorable conditions, massed actions were also used.

On 6 January, in benefiting from an improvement in the weather, the 3d bak with the forces of 105 bombers and under the cover of 39 fighters made a concentrated strike against the railroad junction of Kalinkovich and Zhitkovichi station. At Kalinkovich, seven trains were destroyed. The operations of the junction were halted.

The concentrated air strike planned for 8 January in a sector of the breakthrough by the troops of the front was not carried out due to bad weather, and only on the second half of the day did small groups of assault planes and bombers begin operating against enemy artillery in firing positions, against enemy infantry and military equipment in the concentration areas. Simultaneously the bombers destroyed trains at Kalinkovich junction, while the assault planes prevented the bringing up of reserves to the battlefield.

On 9-12 January, the bombers in groups attacked the railroad lines of communications. Assault planes supported the advance of our troops, destroying enemy artillery and concentrations of personnel and equipment.

On 12 January, bombers from the 3d bak under the cover of fighters again made a concentrated strike against the railroad junction of Kalinkovich. This time the raid involved 17 groups of 6-9 aircraft in each (over 120 bombers), and these basically carried out divebombing and caused enormous losses to the enemy, having destroyed over 50 railroad cars with military equipment, a large number of motor vehicles with troops and freight, and having destroyed around 20 station structures and having set numerous fires. The 779th bap (commander, Lt Col A. V. Khrumchenkov) was awarded the honorary name of Kalinkovich, as particularly distinguishing itself.

In this raid, the commander of the 54th bap, Lt Col M. A. Kritsov, died heroically. From a direct hit from an antiaircraft shell in a dive, the aircraft caught fire and along with the crew, the regiment navigator Maj I. I. Somov and the gunner-radio operator MSgt N. A. Pavlov, it dove into a concentration of enemy trains. After the liberation of Kalinkovich, the remains of the deceased were buried with honors near the airfield of Pesoch-naya Buda.

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M. A. Krivtsov who hailed from Nikolayevskaya Oblast at the age of 16 participated in the Civil War and fought against the White Finns. He started the Great Patriotic War as a squadron commander, and in the autumn was shot down in a dogfight and after recuperation again returned to service, proving himself to be an excellent and strong-willed commander as well as a brave flier. And his crew was up to him.

The actions of the 16th AA had the most tangible impact on the course of the given operation in destroying the enemy trains at the railroad junctions and stations and the knocking of them out by systematic daytime and nighttime bomber strikes, as well as the destruction of enemy strongpoints, artillery, personnel and equipment in the zone of operations of the 65th Army. This helped in the liberating of the towns of Mozyr' and Kalinkovich from the enemy on 14 January. Here the 234th IAD (commander, Col Ye. Z. Tatanashvili) particularly distinguished itself, and it was awarded the honorary name of Mozyr' by an order of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief.

During these days enemy fighters sharply increased their activity, and they endeavored to prevent the actions of our bombers and assault planes. Thus, six Pe-2 from the 301st IAD led by squadron commander Capt G. S. Zolotukhin, under the escort of four fighters in making an attack on a bridge to the east of Bykhov, were attacked by 12 Messerschmitts and 4 Fokker-Wulfs. The numerical superiority of the Nazis did not bring them success. Having lost three aircraft in the battle with our fighters, they broke off the attack. Here the poor training of the fascist fliers could be felt.

Immediately thereafter there appeared over the target a second group of six Pe-2 under the squadron commander of the 96th Guards IAP, Maj A. I. Fadeyev. Ten Messerschmitts attacked them, but all the attacks were driven off. Here the gunner-radio operator Sgt Radishevich shot down one enemy fighter. The group of our aircraft returned to the airfield without losses. Maj A. I. Fadeyev during the war carried out 168 combat sorties and in May 1946 was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

From 21 February, the AA air formations participated in the operation of the 3d and 50th armies to eliminate the enemy bridgehead on the left bank of the Dnepr to the east of Rogachev and Zhlobin. They directly supported the actions of the troops of the front, they destroyed the enemy crossings and the enemy reserves, they prevented them from reaching the battlefield, they covered our troops and carried out reconnaissance.

Many crews from the third IAP during these days proved to be bombing snipers. The squadron commander of the 128th IAP, Capt F. I. Parshin, particularly distinguished himself. Heading nine Pe-2 in a low-altitude attack he destroyed in a single run the temporary bridge over the Dnepr to the south of Rogachev, and as a result of this the Nazi troops were pressed to the river and crushed.

Over the 4 days, the AA carried out 324 sorties against the crossings, and this put the enemy grouping on the bridgehead in a difficult situation. Soon thereafter the bridgehead was eliminated. Having crossed the Dnepr, our troops captured the town of Rogachev on 24 February.

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As a total during January-March 1944, the air formations of the 16th AA carried out 11,400 combat sorties, they engaged in 250 air battles and shot down 200 enemy aircraft. Our losses were significantly less, and namely from the enemy SCAA fire.

In addition to the combat during the winter period the AA air formations were also concerned with combat training and shaped up the young flight personnel which had arrived from the reserve air regiments and from the flight schools.

On 17 February 1944, the Belorussian Front was renamed the First Belorussian Front by a directive from Headquarters.

The failure of the Operation Citadel of the Wehrmacht command which ended with the defeat of the fascist troops on the Kursk Bulge was one of the most important events in the Great Patriotic War.

In the Battle of Kursk, the aviation of Nazi Germany suffered a complete defeat, having lost its former air superiority. Soviet aviation during the summer and autumn engagements of 1943 won air superiority and held it firmly until the end of the war. For the 16th AA, this victory was not an easy one. During just the period of the defensive engagement on the Kursk Bulge the army lost a portion of its aircraft. However, having received replacements and having rebuilt the aircraft fleet, it quickly, without halting operations, brought its air formations to a state of combat readiness and was able to participate in the counteroffensive of the troops of the Central Front and in the subsequent offensive operations of 1943.

The role of aviation in these operations was very significant, and in certain instances (in the crossing of the Dnepr in the region of Loyev), air operations were the decisive factor which determined the success of troop combat.

During this period more advanced operational and tactical methods for the combat use of our aviation were born and gained recognition. These were marked by high effectiveness and ensured the army of successfully carrying out the missions.

For the first time in the Kursk Bulge, the 16th AA began to use on a mass scale concentrated strikes involving up to 400 and more aircraft. As a rule, these strikes were made in the piercing of strong enemy defenses, in actions against the basic enemy troop groupings, and in assisting our troops in repelling counterstrikes by major enemy forces. The effectiveness of the concentrated strikes was high.

Before an attack by our troops, aviation softening up began to be carried out (combined, as a rule, with artillery softening up) for the purpose of suppressing enemy artillery, its strongpoints and centers of resistance, as well as for disrupting troop control.

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With the start of an offensive by the troops of the front, direct air support and strengthened covering of the troops against enemy air strikes were carried out constantly. This support was achieved by concentrated strikes and wave operations by bombers and assault planes.

In the operations there was further development of the air support for the throwing of the tank formations of the front into the breach as well as air support for their operations in an operational depth. When necessary the basic forces of the AA were involved in this. One shad and one iad were assigned, as a rule, for the air support of a tank army.

The improvement in the combat qualities of our aircraft (primarily in terms of speed and rate of climb) made it possible for our fighters to employ battle formations that were deployed along the front and echeloned in altitude. This provided greater freedom of maneuvering in air combat. The development of the radar support system provided an opportunity to shift the patrol zones forward and aided the earlier interception of enemy aircraft. The improving of fighter control from the ground and in the air with the broader use of radio made it possible to promptly inform the pilots of the air situation, to guide them to enemy aircraft and to shift to more important targets, and when necessary to increase the forces in combat. The air battles became longer and more effective, and frequently developed into air engagements.

The combat skill of the flight personnel of the bomber and assault plane units also rose significantly. The effectiveness of their strikes against various targets rose, and they became more accurate in terms of place and time and more strictly coordinated with the actions of the ground troops.

The work of the staffs in planning operations improved. The control of aviation from the forward command posts, as a rule, was carried out in a more organized manner. Continuous and close interaction with the troops and between the branches of aviation became compulsory in all cases of the combat activities of the AA.

The air scouts both in the preparations for and in the course of the battle on the Kursk Bulge and in the subsequent operations promptly detected the moves and concentration areas of the enemy troops, the defensive lines as well as the basing and composition of the enemy aviation.

The work of the political bodies and party organizations in mobilizing the personnel to excellently carrying out the missions of the command became even more concrete, flexible and prompt.

During the period from March 1943 until April 1944, the air formations and units of the 16th AA made 96,400 combat sorties (including 25,000 at night), with more than 53,000 for the bombing and strafing of enemy troops and lines of communications, around 14,600 for covering the troops and repelling air raids, 17,400 for covering our bomber and assault aviation, 10,100 for reconnoitering the enemy, and 1,300 for "free hunting" and other missions.

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In addition, more than 69,700 sorties were made to train the personnel and for ferrying. During this time, more than 2,100 air battles were conducted, during which around 2,000 enemy aircraft were shot down. Our losses were much less. By bombing and strafing attacks, 147 enemy aircraft were destroyed on the ground along with many tanks, motor vehicles, guns, railroad cars, depots, as well as a large number of Nazis.

For successful actions in the battles from Kursk to the Dnepr, the air formations and units of the AA ten times were commended by orders of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief. Many of them were awarded orders and received honorary names.

Thousands of officers, sergeants and privates from the 16th AA during this period received orders and medals of the USSR.

By Ukases of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet in August-April 1943 and in February 1944, the air regiments of the AA which had particularly distinguished themselves were given the following decorations: The Order of Lenin to the 53d Guards iap (commander, Maj I. P. Motornyy); the Order of the Red Banner to the 34th bap, the 58th, 59th and 78th Guards shap, the 30th Guards and the 519th iap (commanders, respectively, Lt Cols P. A. Parfenyuk, V. D. Panfilov, M. G. Sklyarov, A. G. Nakonechnikov, Kh. M. Ibatulin and K. N. Murga).

For successful actions and mass heroism of the flight personnel, the 563d iap (commander, Lt Col V. I. Nenashev) became the 116th Guards iap and was awarded the Order of the Red Banner.

For valor and heroism shown in the battles against the Nazi invaders, the high title of Hero of the Soviet Union was awarded to (in addition to those mentioned previously): Majs Ch. K. Bendeliani (posthumously), N. M. Gusarov and P. P. Pospelov; Capts I. A. Avekov (posthumously), Ya. I. Andryushin, I. F. Balyuk, S. P. Davidenko, G. S. Dubenok, A. P. Savchenko, I. D. Sidorov (posthumously), and P. F. Shevelev; Sr Lts M. P. Mizinov, I. A. Naumenko, S. M. Novichkov, B. M. Rivkin, N. F. Starostin and P. S. Shemendyuk; Lt A. I. Fedorchuk and Jr Lt M. S. Baranov.

The military feats of our aviators were done out of unprecedented courage and valor and a desire for wholehearted struggle against the enemy until its total destruction. The ramblings of fighter pilots V. K. Polyakov, M. I. Vizhunov and R. F. Polyanskiy, the heroic death of the assault plane pilots A. S. Baranov and A. S. Cherezov, the bomber pilot M. A. Krivtsov and the others who repeated the feat of pilot Gastello have gone down as golden pages forever in the history of the Great Patriotic War.



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CHAPTER 3: IN THE BOBRUYSK-WARSAW SECTOR

Preparations for the Offensive

By mid-1944, the Red Army had crushed the strong groupings of Nazi troops in the northwestern and southwestern sectors. This created conditions for making a strike at the center on the shortest path to Germany.

In fearing this strike, the Nazi command had concentrated a large troop grouping on Belorussian territory called the Army Group Center, and had also formed a deeply echeloned defense.

For the purpose of defeating this grouping and liberating Belorussia, the Soviet Supreme High Command had decided to conduct an operation under the codename of Bagration. For carrying it out troops from the First Belorussian Front were to be involved in cooperation with the adjacent fronts.

On the defensive in the zone of the front stretching up to 700 km were the 9th (in the Bobruysk sector) and the 2d (in the Poles'ye) German field armies, as well as formations from the 4th Tank Army. Their fighting strength was around 45 divisions and a significant number of reinforcement units. The Nazi aviation operating in these sectors included air squadrons from the 6th and partially the 4th air fleets. This was based principally at the airfield centers in the regions of Minsk, Baranovichi, Brest and Lyublin. The fighting strength was 800-850 aircraft, including around 500 bombers.

The troops of the First Belorussian Front under the command of Gen Arm (from 29 June Mar SU) K. K. Rokossovskiy, after the winter battles, in mid-April 1944 began preparations for the summer offensive.

The 16th AA was also beginning preparations for combat in the new operations. At this time its fighting strength included the 3d bak (the 241st and 301st bad), the 6th sak (221st bad and 282d iad), the 271st nbad, the 2d Guards and 299th shad, the 234th, 283d and 286th iad, the 16th odrap, the 98th okrap and the 65th okrae. As a result of the continuous heavy battles, 40-60 aircraft remained in each of the air divisions. As a total

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the army had 658 combat aircraft. On the basis of the instructions from the commander of the AA, Lt Gen (from 11 May, Col Gen) Avn S. I. Rudenko, intensive combat preparations were undertaken, and in the course of this the combat skill of the fliers and navigators was improved and the young flight personnel gained experience.

Due to the fact that the Second Belorussian Front turned over its zone encompassing the Poles'ye on the south and the troops located in it to the First Belorussian Front, the 6th AA of the Second Belorussian Front under the command of Hero of the Soviet Union, Lt Gen Avn F. P. Polynin, in April 1944, became part of the First Belorussian Front, and was put under the commander of the 16th AA, as a member of the front military council.<sup>1</sup>

By the end of April, the 6th AA included: the 3d Guards shad (33d, 70th and 71st Guards shap) under the command of Col G. A. Sukhorebrikov, and from June, Lt Col A. A. Smirnov; the 336th iad (163d, 265th and 483d iap) under the command of Col S. M. Petrov, and from June, Col S. P. Grashchenkov; the 242d nbad (661st, 717th and 997th nbap), commander Col D. A. Abanin, and from May, Col P. A. Kalinin; the 72d orap and 93d okrap under the command of Lt Cols A. Ya. Gavil'chenko and K. M. Myasoyedov. The army had 263 aircraft.

In May-June, after being brought up to full strength, the 1st Guards and 273 iad were returned to the 16th AA. In addition, the 8th iak, the 4th shak, the 132d bad, the 300th shad and the 19th iap arrived as new units.

The 8th iak under the command of Hero of the Soviet Union, Lt Gen Avn A. S. Osipenko was being brought up to full strength. Its 215th iad (the 156th, 263d and 813th iap) was under the command of Col M. N. Yakushin who had distinguished himself in battles against fascism in Republican Spain. The 323d iad (149th, 246th, 269th and 484th iap) was headed by Col P. P. Rybakov. Both air divisions had a good deal of combat experience.

The 4th shak arrived under the command of Hero of the Soviet Union Maj Gen Avn G. F. Baydukov. The air corps had just commenced combat operations. The 196th shad (289th, 657th and 946th shap) and the 199th shad (136th, 569th, 724th and 783d shap) headed by Lt Col K. K. Grishchenko and Col N. S. Vinogradov had been formed from air regiments withdrawn from the front for additional manning. The newly arrived 132d bad (commander, Maj Gen Avn I. L. Fedorov) was incorporated as part of the 6th sak. The 300th shad (106th, 382d, 724th and 904th shap) under the command of Col T. Ye. Kovalev had little combat experience.

The 19th iap headed by Lt Col P. F. Chupikov had been fighting the Nazi invaders from the first days of the war. The regiment was directly under the commander of the Air Force and was manned with the strongest pilots.

<sup>1</sup> Arkhiv MO SSSR, folio 36d, inv. 6476, files 349-350, sheet 1; file 229, sheet 144; file 273, sheet 85.

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The 8th iak, the 4th shak and the 300th shad which had arrived to reinforce the army were received at the rear airfields 200-300 km from the front line and were included in the intensive preparations for combat. The experienced commanders of the 2d Guards and 299th shad twice flew out with the young fliers from the 4th shak and the 300th shad to strafe the enemy troops.

In May-June 1944, Maj Gen Avn I. M. Dzusov was appointed commander of the 6th iak, Col M. Kh. Borisenko assumed command of the 6th sak, Lt Col K. I. Rasskazov was in command of the 271st nbad, and Lt Col N. V. Isayev the 273d iad.

The flight personnel was intensely trained by the deputy commander of the AA, Maj Gen Avn M. M. Kosykh, by the commanders of the corps, divisions, regiments and their deputies for flight matters, as well as the inspectors for piloting techniques Lt Cols K. I. Yelochkin and B. A. Morozov, Maj R. G. Yemets, V. A. Vatsenko, G. P. Kostandi, V. M. Averichev, V. P. Litvinenko, V. I. Byvshev, S. S. Marshalkovich, S. M. Belyavskiy and others.

Gen S. I. Rudenko devoted a great deal of attention to improving the skills of the flight personnel. In possessing great experience and knowledge, organizational abilities and inexhaustible energy, he personally participated in organizing the training of the flight personnel and supervised the course of it, demanding from each flier high piloting techniques as well as the complete mastery of air tactics as applied to the conditions of the pending operation.

Simultaneously with flight training, tactical conferences to exchange combat experience were held in all the air units. At them they analyzed the strong and weak points of the enemy aviation, and recommendations were worked out on the tactics of air combat, the method of making bombing strikes against the enemy and their reconnaissance. Then tactical flight exercises were held in all the air formations.

A great deal of attention was given to training the leadership. In each air formation, 3-day courses were held for the commanders of the air regiments and squadrons, and here they inspected piloting techniques and discussed questions of improving the battleworthiness of the air units. The commander of the AA held a 2-day course with the commanders of the air corps and divisions at which they discussed operational-tactical questions in relation to the pending operation.

During the preparations for the offensive (April-June), the air units of the AA made up to 48,000 non-combat sorties, including around 27,000 training flights.

The officers of the air staffs carried out extensive work in the course of the preparations. Under the leadership of the experienced and energetic chief of staff of the AA, Maj Gen Avn P. I. Brayko, the staff departments

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and services carried out measures to plan the combat of the air formations of the AA in the operation, to coordinate them with the formations of the ground forces of the front and between the air branches, as well as in the area of air reconnaissance and navigation training.

Participating actively in the elaboration of the documents, in the daily supervision of combat operations and preparations, as well as in generalizing the combat experience of the air formations were the chief of the AA staff operations department Col I. I. Ostrovskiy, his deputies and assistants Col L. M. Merinov, Lt Col D. M. Trifonov, Maj P. T. Gromadnyy, D. T. Deryugin, F. P. Ivanov, N. G. Puzyrev and G. S. Shimanov, Lt M. P. Vasil'yev and others.

Intense creative work was carried out also on the staffs of the air corps, divisions and regiments. The following officers stood out in their high organization of operational reconnaissance work: The chief of staff Col I. L. Vlasov and Col V. I. Golutvin and Maj S. D. Ogorodnik of the 3d bak; chief of staff Col I. N. Lyshenko and Maj S. F. Zin'kovskiy and Ye. A. Bulygin of the 2d Guards shad; chief of staff Lt Col V. P. Tokmakov, Lt Col A. A. Khetagurov and Maj I. P. Malyutin of the 299th shad; chief of staff Col A. V. Ryndin, Lt Col L. S. Okinchits of the 283d iad; chief of staff Col I. M. Kuz'min and Lt Col I. I. Volkov of the 301st bad; chief of staff Lt Col G. V. Tomshenkov, Maj M. D. Gutnichenko and Capt A. Z. Gaynulin of the 271st nbad; chief of staff Col F. A. Lukashchuk of the 211st bad; Lt Col S. I. Skvortsov, Capt I. S. Voykov of the 16th odrap, and others.

The chief of the army political department Col V. I. Vikhrov and the officers of the political department Lt Col D. N. Pugin, Maj I. M. Kirshkevich, M. Ye. Yasinovskiy, A. G. Zotov, and P. A. Katapayev, Capt Ye. P. Govorov and others were reliable combat assistants to the army command. In the units all the work both in the preparations for and in the course of the operations was carried out under the leadership of the deputy army commander for political affairs Gen A. S. Vinogradov, in providing help to the political workers in the political support of combat, and in raising the organization and purposefulness in the patriotic indoctrination of the personnel.

The political bodies and the party organizations of the units, in preparing for combat, worked constantly to indoctrinate the personnel of the AA in a spirit of total dedication to the socialist fatherland and hate for the enemy. They explained the international and domestic situation of the nation, the requirements of the military oath, and they also mobilized the personnel to excellently carry out the missions, to carefully prepare the materiel and to continuously support the operations of the air units.

The party organizations of the units devoted a great deal of attention to the growth of the ranks of the Communist Party. During the first 4 months of 1944, 1,719 persons were admitted as members and candidate members of the party. In June, the AA had 10,440 members of the VKP(b) and 6,480 candidate members.<sup>1</sup> The communists cemented the ranks of the aviators together.

<sup>1</sup> Arkhiv MO SSSR, folio 368, inv. 6512, file 84, sheet 372.

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Prior to the offensive, meetings were held for the leadership of the units and the party-Komsomol aktiv, as well as party-Komsomol meetings with the agenda "On the Political Support for Combat." The tasks of the party and Komsomol organizations were clarified, and in addition a decision was passed which obliged the communists and Komsomol members to set the example and to carry out the combat missions excellently. As a result of the great political indoctrination carried out by the political bodies, the offensive spirit of the personnel of the 16th AA was very high.

The presence of forested areas and the small number of characteristic landmarks in the zone of the forthcoming offensive by the troops of the front required a particular organization of navigation support. The chief navigator of the army, Col B. P. Lapshin, carried out a 5-day course on the questions of air navigation for 98 commanders (leaders) of groups. On the terrain a complex system of ground air navigation support was deployed in the form of numerous radio and light beacons, homing stations and radio direction finders, as well as man-made markers laid out on the ground at characteristic points. This facilitated orientation for the personnel and the reaching of the target.

The signal troops under the leadership of Col N. D. Ignatov provided uninterrupted and reliable communications between the AA staff and all the air formations and the cooperating field forces of the ground troops both in preparing for the offensive as well as in the course of it. By the start of the operation, the AA had the 16th Signals Regiment (commander, Lt Col Z. M. Roshal'), one signals battalion from the Air Force reserve and the 31st Detached Signals Company. In preparing for the offensive, for the purpose of concealing the grouping of our aviation from the enemy, control was carried out by wire communications which were under the command of Majs S. I. Kholchev and M. G. Pskunov. The radio communications developed under the leadership of Maj A. V. Krasnyukov and designed for controlling aviation in the course of the offensive had 26 radio nets.

There was also much to be done by the officers of the personnel department, the special department, as well as the meteorological and other services which were led by Lt Cols I. M. Mikhaylov and N. V. Kundyrevich, Col Surkov, Engr-Maj G. K. Astenenko and Engr apt N. Z. Pinus.

The personnel of the aviation engineering service (ias) of the army headed by Engr-Col V. I. Rebrov did a good deal of work in preparing the materiel for the forthcoming operation. As a result of the work done by the engineering and technical personnel, by the start of the offensive just 2.7 percent nonflying aircraft remained in the army. Here particularly excellent work had been done by Eng- Lt Cols F. N. Aralovets, N. A. Alekseyev, V. M. Lazarev and G. G. Nyrkov, Engr-Maj N. I. Zhuk and many others.

The air rear units led by Maj Gen Avn A. S. Kirillov also prepared intensely for the forthcoming operation. The basic missions of the rear were: the daily support of the combat operations of the flying units,

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the preparation of the forward airfields and the creation of supplies of fuel, ammunition and food. Many difficulties were encountered in material and technical supply and in supporting the action of the air units. They were explained by the fact that the rear bodies of the army were located over a significant territory (300-500 km along the front and an equal distance in depth), and had a limited number of motor transport. Many types of food had to be sought by the troops themselves, and moreover in regions of the country which had been destroyed and burned out by the Nazis.

By the start of the operation, the rear of the 16th AA in the Bobryusk sector had 7 rab (21st, 25th, 28th, 56th, 75th, 79th and 80th), 47 bao, 46 airfield technical companies, 7 airfield engineering and 7 motor transport battalions, 1 transport squadron, 7 head air depots, 2 stationary and 2 mobile air shops, 1 stationary motor repair shop and 9 field air repair shops. In the base region of the 6th AA there were 38 bao. The presence of these units were to support the forthcoming combat operations of the army.

As a result of the enormous work done by the rear bodies, at the airfields and at the depots of the army supplies of ammunition were created for 15-20 days of operations and aviation fuel for 10-12 days. The food supplies were for 25-30 daily rations. Much was done for this by the chief of staff of the rear Col V. V. Golodyayevskiy, Lt Col A. V. Fedorov and Capt N. M. Shopin, Lt Col I. A. Gol'sin, Majs M. N. Shadrin, A. P. Volokhov and others. The immediate work of supporting the combat operations of the air units was excellently carried out by the RAB chiefs Cols M. I. Kuzin, I. F. Ofitserov, M. A. Vasil'yev, A. P. Olif'renko, N. D. Pertsulenko, M. P. Shcherbatyuk and Lt Col A. V. Ginzberg.

In the army's base area in the Bobruysk sector there were 142 airfields, including 53 with deployed rear services, that is, almost each air regiment had its own airfield. The 6th AA had 63 airfields. For the purpose of concealing the base areas of our aviation from the enemy, the airfield construction department (chief, Lt Col V. V. Perevoznikov, officers Engr-Lt Col S. M. Korolev, Engr-Capts L. L. Eberg and A. S. Mikhaylovskiy) carried out extensive work to camouflage all of the active airfields and create dummy ones. At the 12 dummy airfields 298 dummy aircraft were set out along with 85 dummy vehicles and antiaircraft guns, and over 150 various dummy structures were built. This led to a situation where over the period from January through September 1944, the enemy aviation bombed actual airfields only three times (and here one aircraft was lost), while the dummy airfields were bombed 128 times. The creation of dummy airfields proved fully effective.

The antiaircraft defenses of the AA airfields in the Bobryusk sector were provided by eight airfield air defense regiments and seven detached anti-aircraft machine gun companies (chief of the air defense department, Col Ye. Ye. Bendyukov).

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The physicians of all specialties worked with inspiration on the medical support for the units. They constantly followed the health of the aviators and provided enormous aid to the sick and wounded. In the air formations the best organizers of the medical service were Col Med Serv N. T. Gorchakov, Lt Cols Med Serv V. I. Gorodnichev, S. Ye. Nemtseyev, B. I. Panin, M. P. Voskresenskiy, G. Ya. Tavrovskiy, Majs Med Serv G. K. Agarkov, S. V. Logachev, A. F. Novitskiy, N. A. Pazyuk, M. R. Freydes, L. D. Tseytlin, I. Ye. Zaslavskiy, I. G. Posternak, and others.

Simultaneously with the preparations for the offensive, the 16th AA also carried out combat missions. The air units attacked moving trains and troop accumulations, they carried out air reconnaissance, they covered the troops on the front and delivered cargo to the partisans.

From April through June, the AA made 4,538 combat sorties and by bombing strikes caused the enemy a good deal of damage in personnel and military equipment. In 84 air battles, 68 fascist aircraft were shot down.

The command of the front devoted a great deal of attention to the camouflaging of the troops. The AA was entrusted with systematic air observation of all the roads over which the regrouping was to be carried out as well as the troop concentration areas. The results of the observations were immediately reported to the command of the front. The camouflaging of the troops as well as the active struggle against enemy reconnaissance prevented the enemy from guessing the plan of the Soviet command.

In the interests of the pending offensive, the staff of the AA organized intensive air reconnaissance. Daytime tactical air reconnaissance was carried out by the non-T/O reconnaissance squadrons from the 283d and 286th iad (in difficult weather conditions, by the 2d Guards and 299th shad), and at night by reconnaissance planes from the 271st nbad. Operational air reconnaissance and the photographing of the enemy defensive lines were entrusted to the 16th odrap, and the photographing of the main defensive zone also to the 98th okrap. As a total 150 aircraft were involved in air reconnaissance, including 90 on the Bobryusk sector.

In recalling the preparations for the operation, the former artillery commander of the First Belorussian Front, Mar Art V. I. Kazakov, has written in the book, "Osvobozhdeniye Belorussii" [The Liberation of Belorussia], that the interpretation of the aerial photographs from just the 98th okrap made it possible to establish the location of 146 artillery batteries, 99 prepared firing positions, 61 mortar batteries, 13 antiaircraft batteries and 102 separate guns. Very valuable data, particularly under the conditions of forested terrain, were supplied by the staffs and the visual air reconnaissance which detected around 2,000 different targets. All of this made it possible to disclose the enemy defenses rather completely. The artillery received the necessary data for preparing accurate and effective fire.

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By the start of the operation, using vertical and oblique air photographing, the enemy defenses had been disclosed to the entire operational depth. Here in the sectors of the main strikes by the troops of the front, the enemy defenses had been photographed repeatedly. The airfields were reconnoitered almost daily, and this made it possible to accurately establish the basing and number of fascist aviation. In carrying out reconnaissance missions in the Bobryusk sector, the fliers from the 721st iap, Hero of the Soviet Union Capt I. S. Kozich, Sr Lt A. P. Lipatov, Lts V. G. Semenov and B. I. Yakushev, Jr Lt D. N. Medvedev and others particularly distinguished themselves, as well as the scouts of the 16th odrap, Capts N. L. Kavun and A. I. Rengach, Lts A. K. Knysh, A. T. Nazarov, and others. On the Kovel' sector, the missions were carried out excellently by the scouts from the 72d orap Heroes of the Soviet Union Majs V. G. Podkolodnov and V. A. Smirnov (both died on 9 July 1944 in carrying out a mission), Maj I. Ye. Velikiy, Sr Lt N. P. Kanishchev, and others.

The scouts from the 16th odrap, the pilot Lt V. A. Yershov and the navigator Sr Lt G. P. Sobkovskiy who were awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union acted courageously. Each of them had over 100 successfully fulfilled long-distance combat reconnaissance flights. They were aces in reconnoitering enemy airfields and this was considered as the most dangerous mission. Over 380 times the fliers appeared over the airfields photographing them. In many flights their aircraft was subjected to anti-aircraft fire and attacks by enemy fighters. But due to the courage, excellent piloting techniques and able tactical actions the crew emerged the winner and returned to its airfield.

The results of air reconnaissance carried out in the preparations for the Belorussian Operation were very valuable and were used along with the data of other types of intelligence in compiling blank maps by the military topographic service of the front's staff with the contours plotted on them for the defensive lines and location of enemy weapons. These maps were sent out to the troops of the front. For the air units they served as target maps.

The reconnaissance department of the staff of the 16th AA and the intelligence officers of the air formations carried out extensive and painstaking work to supply the troops of the front with data on the opposing enemy. Night and day they secured and analyzed an enormous quantity of diverse information on the enemy and reported the generalized data to the command. Much inventiveness in the organization and execution of air reconnaissance was shown by the deputy chief of the reconnaissance department Lt Col N. P. Dmitriyev, the chief of the aerial photography service Maj M. F. Karpenko, Maj V. I. Pokhil'chenko, Sr Lts S. M. Arkhipov, M. I. Zarayskiy, and others.

The 16th AA on 24 June 1944 numbered 2,319 flying combat aircraft, including 331 daytime bombers and 149 night bombers, 661 assault planes, 1,108 fighters, and 70 reconnaissance planes and spotters. There were 1,846 combat-ready crews. On the left wing of the front, the 6th AA had 321 aircraft and 248 combat-ready crews. Both armies had superiority in numbers over the enemy aviation.



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The Soviet-produced aircraft which were flown by the air units in terms of many characteristics were superior to the enemy aircraft. The flight personnel, having gained diverse experience in the preceding engagements, in their majority also surpassed the enemy fliers in terms of combat skills. In the army by this time an entire galaxy of air aces had arisen and decorated with the orders of the Order of Lenin and the Gold Star of the Hero of the Soviet Union.

On 13 April 1944, by the Ukase of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet, for the exemplary fulfillment of the missions of the command, for valor and courage, the title of Hero of the Soviet Union was awarded to Maj G. I. Kopayev, Capts V. L. Volgin, P. A. Del'tsov, Ye. A. Mikhalev, N. M. Tregubov and V. F. Khokhlachev; posthumously to Capts A. A. Bondar', A. I. Kadomtsev and I. A. Lozenko, Sr Lts M. N. Pavlov and A. A. Sviridov, and to Lt A. S. Cherezov.

Each of them had hundreds of combat sorties and had destroyed a large quantity of enemy military equipment.

Thus, the pilot-navigator of the 59th Guards shap, Guards Maj G. I. Kopayev by this time had 230 combat sorties, having destroyed 70 tanks, 14 aircraft at airfields and 3 in air battles. The commander of the air squadron of the 78th Guards shap, Guards Capt Ye. A. Mikhalev, had carried out 240 combat sorties, during which he destroyed 34 tanks, 118 guns and mortars, 27 aircraft and much other military equipment. To the score of the air squadron commander of the 24th bap, Capt P. A. Del'tsov, were 221 combat sorties, including 188 to destroy enemy equipment and personnel and the remainder for reconnaissance deep in the enemy rear. The air squadron commander of the 128th bap, Sr Lt A. A. Sviridov, had successfully carried out 205 combat sorties for bombing and reconnaissance of enemy troops.

The holder of the Gold Star, Guards Capt Vasilii Fedorovich Khokhlachev was awarded this honorary title for 135 combat sorties and able leadership of an assault plane squadron which destroyed much military equipment in battles. The son of a poor peasant, Khokhlachev by Komsomol recruitment had been sent to the Engel's Pilot School. He received his baptism in fire in October 1941 on the Western Front. A year later, communist Khokhlachev was in the ranks of the defenders of Stalingrad and later a participant in the Battle of Kursk, the liberation of Belorussia, Poland and the defeat of the fascists in Berlin, holding the positions of flight commander, squadron commander and navigator of the 79th Guards shap. A courageous sniper of assault plane strikes, Khokhlachev showed exceptional loyalty to the cause of Lenin's party and hate for the Nazi invaders. Without fearing death, he destroyed the Nazi occupiers. And he taught his subordinates this. In combat he correctly assessed the situation, he able employed maneuvers and cooperated with the cover fighters, and in a majority of his sorties did not have any losses in his group. During the time of the war, Guardsman Khokhlachev carried out 214 combat sorties. He was wounded in the battles of Leningrad. For military feats he was awarded many orders and medals. After the war flier Khokhlachev successfully completed the Red Banner Air Force Academy

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and later the Military Academy of the General Staff. In having great combat experience and high training, for many years he commanded the aviation of a military district. At present Lt Gen Avn V. F. Khokhlachev is in the reserves.

In accord with the directive of Headquarters for the operation to liberate Belorussia, the decision of the troop commander of the First Belorussian Front came down to piercing the enemy defenses to the north of Rogachev and to the south of Parichi on the right wing and with a pincers movement surround and destroy the Bobruysk enemy grouping and then advance on Slutsk; with the troops of the left wing of the front to check the opposing enemy. The 16th AA was to assist the offensive of the assault groupings of the front, having concentrated the basic forces to support the Rogachev group.

The plan for the operation was given 2 weeks before its start, and after this the command and staff of the AA worked out a plan for the combat use of the aviation during the operation, as well as missions for each air formation and an operation order for the first day of the offensive. Proceeding from the plan of the operation, the commander of the AA allocated the air forces in the sectors in the following manner.

For aiding the 3d and 48th armies on the offensive near Rogachev, the 3d bak, the 6th sak, the 4th shak, the 6th iak, the 1st Guards and 286th iad, the 19th iap and the 271st nbad were assigned; they had a total of 1,429 aircraft. The first strike with the start of the operation was planned against the enemy defenses using 1,020 aircraft (290 daytime bombers, 235 assault planes and 495 fighters).

For assisting the 65th and 28th armies on the offensive near Parichi, the 2d Guards, 299th and 300th shad, the 8th iak, the 283d iad and the 242d nbad were assigned; they had a total of 897 aircraft. They planned to use 772 aircraft on the first strike.

In aiding the troops in piercing the enemy defensive zone and in developing the success, the air formations were to destroy enemy personnel, artillery in firing positions and equipment, to support the throwing of the mobile formations into the breach and their operations in depth, to prevent the reserves from reaching the battlefield, to win air superiority and carry out reconnaissance in the interests of the troops and aviation.

As a total on the first day of the operation, around 6,900 sorties were to be made, including 520 by the night bombers and 910 by the daylight bombers, 2,000 by assault planes and 3,470 by the fighters.

According to the order the first 3 hours after the start of the attack all the aviation should operate according to the plan of the AA commander; then a portion of the shad was to be transferred to operational subordination of the commanders of the combined-arms armies.

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The actions of the aviation on the second and subsequent days of the offensive were planned in accord with the instructions of the troops commander of the front, as well as proceeding from the situation developing in the course of the operation.

Seven days before the start of the operation, Gen S. I. Rudenko personally assigned the missions to the commanders of the air formations, and demanded that they carefully coordinate all questions of cooperating with the troops. Here also the commanders of the air formations were given target maps for a detailed study of them by the flight personnel.

The working out of the questions of the cooperation of aviation with the troop staffs of the air corps and divisions was completed in 2 days. Two days before the offensive, the missions were carefully studied by the commanders of the regiments, squadrons and the personnel, and then in the playing out of the pending operations was conducted on maps.

Cooperation between the branches of aviation was organized according to the principle of the assigning of fighter divisions to the assault plane and bomber formations for the entire period of the operation. The air formations (units) which were cooperating were based, as a rule, at nearby airfields.

In preparing for the operation, only a portion of the aviation needed for daily operations was stationed at the forward airfields. The basic forces of the air army were at the rear airfields. The rebasing of the aviation to the forward airfields was carried out on 20 and 21 July. On these days the low clouds prevented enemy air reconnaissance, and the moving of the aviation at altitudes of 100-300 meters excluded the possibility of detecting it with enemy radars.

In line with the splitting of the aviation on the right wing of the front into the two sectors, the leadership over its combat on the first days of the operation was planned independently for each of them. For this auxiliary command posts (VPU) were organized: No 1 to the south of Rogachev, and No 2 to the south of Parichi. At the first of these was Gen S. I. Rudenko with a small group of officers, while Gen M. M. Kosykh was at the second. For each of the VPU radios were set up for communications with the AA command post, with the cooperating formations and air scouts, and in addition a radio center was set up with three-four receivers. Moreover the VPU had contact with the command post of the air army over the ST [teletype] and by liaison aircraft. Gen P. I. Brayko remained in the main command post set up at point Krasnoye.

#### The Bobruysk Offensive Operation

On the morning of 24 June 1944, after the nighttime air and 2-hour artillery softening up, the troops on the right wing of the First Belorussian Front began an offensive the first stage of which was termed the Bobruysk Operation.

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On the night prior to the offensive, the 242d and 271st nbad cooperating with the long-range aviation attacked enemy troops in regions to the north and west of Rogachev and Ozarichi, while 20 bombers from the 6th sak consecutively bombed the Bobruysk airfield. As a total the forces of the 16th AA made 313 sorties; the actions of the night aircraft were impeded by a heavy fog.

On the morning of 24 June, the combat actions of the AA air regiments started in a solemn ceremony and were carried out with colors unfurled on the tarmac. Prior to the start of the combat sorties the appeals of the military council of the front and the AA command were read to the formation of the personnel. Then meetings were held. The news that our troops had gone over to an offensive was greeted with a great upsurge in the units. The commanders and pilots, the sergeants and privates, the communists, the Komsomol members and the nonparty persons who spoke at the meetings vowed to honorably carry out their military duty.

In the 44th Guards nbap, Guards Sr Lt M. I. Gutorov said at a meeting: "The time has come to settle the score with the Nazis for the evil deeds carried out by them on the Belorussian land. The people are calling on us to liberate the homeland of the enemy. We will not spare our lives and will carry out the oath of the Guardsmen to the end." Guards Maj N. A. Osipov said: "Before the Guards colors I vow to the command of the unit that the personnel of my squadron will honorably carry out the given mission." Then Guardsman Gutorov and Osipov on bended knee kissed the regimental colors.

Speaking at meetings in the air units of the 6th sak were Heroes of the Soviet Union Capt I. I. Romanenko and A. P. Savchenko, as well as other former fliers, navigators and mechanics. The speakers vowed to honorably carry out the missions of the command, they urged that the bombs be dropped accurately on the enemy, and the fighters to maintain air superiority, in aiding the troops of the front in the defeat of the fascist barbarians. The commander of the 8th Guards bap, Guards Lt Col G. I. Popov was the first to vow in front of the unfurled colors that the honor of the regiment would be maintained. Similar solemn meetings were held in the other air units of the AA.

The ceremony of the military oath of the honored commanders and fliers had an exceptional influence on all the personnel, particularly on the youth. The junior lieutenant from the 79th Guards shap I. G. Morozov in his speech at the meeting said: "Today is the most joyous day for me. With my crew I am to receive my baptism in fire. My dreams have been realized. I can now carry out my soldier's duty to the motherland. I vow to my senior commanders that in the struggle against the enemy I will not defame the Russian soldiers and the traditions of the Siberians." Jr Lt I. I. Tsypliyatov (783d shap) stated: "On behalf of the young fliers who today are going into battle, I vow to the party and the motherland that we will not spare our lives for clearing our sacred land." Flier Tsypliyatov and the gunner Averin in the first combat sortie died a death of heroes, having repeated the immortal feat of Capt N. F. Gastello in the region of Bol'shaya Krushinovka. Their fellow countrymen remembered the legacy of their comrade-in-arms and avenged the Nazi aggressors for their heroic death.

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From the morning of 24 June, the fog and low clouds in the base area and over the battlefield greatly impeded aviation operations. For this reason the planned concentrated strikes against the enemy troops were not carried out. Only the assault planes and fighters began to operate in elements and small groups. By the middle of the day the weather improved and all the air units began to carry out the missions set for the operation.

The bomber aviation destroyed the enemy artillery and mortars in the firing positions as well as the enemy strongpoints in the area of the 3d Army. The 3d bak made two concentrated strikes with the forces of 298 aircraft. The bombing was carried out by elements from altitudes of 800-1,500 meters in one or two passes. Particularly important small targets were hit by dive-bombing; the most effective were the actions of three groups from the 779th bap headed by Lt Col A. V. Khrumchenkov, Capt A. A. Anpilov and P. N. Ksyunin. Moreover, up to 150 bombers from the 6th sak operated against objectives in these same regions.

The assault aviation by bombing and strafing strikes destroyed enemy artillery in positions, tanks, motor transport on the roads and infantry in the ditches in the region of Zazer'ye, Tikhinichi, Rudnya-Bronskaya and in the region of Parichi, Mikul'Gorodok, and Zelenkovichi. The combat actions of the assault planes basically had the nature of wave strikes in groups of 4-10 aircraft. The enemy troops were constantly exposed to the assault planes which attacked from altitudes of 1,000-800 meters into a dive, making up to eight passes at a target.

The fighter aviation firmly kept air superiority and did not allow the fascist fliers to reach the battlefield. With the appearance of our aircraft beyond the front line, enemy aviation put up little resistance. This made it possible for the Soviet fighters to widely use strafing actions against ground objectives. Over the day only 143 aircraft overflights were noted by the enemy; the main forces of the enemy aviation at that time were occupied on other sectors.

On the first day of the offensive, the 3d and 48th armies captured only the first and second enemy trench lines. The offensive by the troops of the 65th and 28th armies developed more successfully. With active support by the assault planes and with dependable fighter cover the troops pierced the enemy defenses to the south of Parichi on an area up to 30 km wide, and the 1st Guards Tank Corps which was thrown into the breach moved 20 km into the enemy defenses.

The commitment of the tank corps to the breach was supported by the 2d Guards shad. At 1330 hours the commander of the division, in moving with a group of officers to the command post of the tank corps, summoned his assault planes by radio. Some 40 Il-2 aircraft appeared at the designated time over the leading tanks, and 15 minutes later, another 35 assault planes. By their attacks on the enemy troops, they aided the advance of the tanks.

Regardless of the bad weather on this day, a predominant majority of the fliers demonstrated high flying skills and a desire to achieve victory over the hated enemy.

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Thus, eight Yak-1 fighters under the command of Hero of the Soviet Union Guards Capt N. A. Naydenov (283d iad) were covering a group of assault planes. In the target area the IIs were attacked by enemy fighters. Our fliers drove off all the attacks. During the 6-minute engagement, three fascist fighters were shot down and the remainder left the battlefield.

The assault planes also fought skillfully. A group of IIs from the 946th shap headed by Sr Lt A. I. Rytov was attacked over the target by enemy fighters. The assault planes rapidly formed a circle and in continuing to strafe the target drove off the attacks of the German fighters. The aircraft in which the gunner Sr Sgt M. I. Kostyukovskiy was a member of the crew, in pulling out of a dive was attacked by two Fokker-Wulfs. Kostyukovskiy did not lose his head and, in ably controlling his weapon, by accurate fire shot down on enemy fighter. The assault planes carried out the combat mission excellently and returned to their airfield without losses.

Sr Lt B. G. Deyev (352d iap) demonstrated great skill. Over the battlefield he shot down a German Raima FW-189 reconnaissance plane, and for this he was awarded the Order of the Red Banner by Chief Mar Avn A. A. Novikov.

A high patriotic upsurge reigned among the aviators of the 3d bak. As is known, the Pe-2 aircraft was designed for a normal bomb load of 600-800 kg. Inspired by the desire to drop as many bombs on the head of the enemy as possible, the crews overloaded the aircraft, that is, they carried 1,000 kg of bombs and more. The reliability of the aircraft's design, the state of the airfields and the skills of the pilots made it possible to do this.

The initiators of this campaign were aviators from the 779th bap headed by Lt Col A. V. Khrumchenkov. The deputy commander of the air squadron, Sr Lt N. I. Skosyrev, was the first to demonstrate the possibility of the safe take-off of a Pe-2 aircraft with a payload of 1,000 kg of bombs. Capt S. A. Pinayev even carried 1,200 kg of bombs.

The patriotic initiative of the crews from the 779th bap was quickly seized upon in the other air regiments, where Lt S. G. Artem'yev (24th bap), Hero of the Soviet Union, Guards Maj A. P. Smirnov (96th Guards bap), and others were the followers of this movement. Now an additional 200-400 kg of bombs were being dropped from each Pe-2 aircraft.

On this day the aviators showed great courage and steadfastness. The pilot from the 56th Guards iap, Lt V. P. Vusikov, in escorting a group of IIs, made a dive at a ground target with them. During the attack Guardsman Vusikov was wounded in the arm with shrapnel from an aircraft shell, but he continued to carry out the mission. At the airfield he was instructed to go to the medical unit, but he refused and after bandaging made another two combat sorties on this day. The member of the party bureau of the 724th shap, the squadron commander Capt P. I. Borisenko was wounded in the arm and the leg in carrying out his mission. In losing blood and in overcoming pain, he safely brought the aircraft back to our territory and landed on a forward airfield.

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During the first day of the operation, the air units of the 16th AA made 3,191 combat sorties, including 1,846 sorties for bombing and strafing the enemy troops, 860 for escorting bombers and assault planes, 264 for covering the troops, 102 for air reconnaissance, 99 for "free hunting," and 20 for bombing an airfield. During the day 6 tanks, 382 vehicles, 2 balloons, and 94 guns and mortars were destroyed and damaged, and 7 dumps were blown up. In the 42 air battles, 20 fascist aircraft were shot down. Our aviation suffered losses basically from the firing of enemy antiaircraft weapons.

On the second day of the operation, the troops from the Rogachev group of the front, in encountering stubborn resistance from the enemy, overcame enemy defenses slowly. In the zone of the second assault group, behind the 1st Guards Tank Corps, a cavalry mechanized group (CMG) was thrown into the breach, and this group began to rapidly advance in a northwesterly direction for outflanking Bobruysk.

The air formations of the AA continued to support the troops of the front in broadening the breakthrough of the enemy defenses, without allowing the enemy reserves to be brought up and in supporting the advance of the mobile formations. The weather was not favorable for air operations. During the night of 25 June, the night bombers from two ndad and the 6th sak destroyed enemy troops to the west and northwest of Rogachev and Ozarichi, they bombed the Bobruysk airfield and conducted reconnaissance.

During the day by wave and concentrated strikes, bombers from the 3d bak and 6th sak and assault planes from the 4th shak, the 2d Guards, 299th and 300th shad escorted by fighters from the 6th and 8th iak, the 1st Guards, the 283d and 286th iad destroyed artillery in position, enemy troops and equipment in the region of Bol'shaya Krushinovka, Zabolot'ye and Zhilichi and the region of Brozha, Gomza and Balashevichi. By destroying the crossing over the Berezina River and the troop concentrations at Titovka, the enemy was prevented from pulling back to Bobruysk. Fighters from the 6th and 8th iak in addition to escorting bombers and assault planes covered the battle formations of the troops on the front and engaged in "free hunting."

For the assault aviation the escorting the supporting of mobile troops was the most difficult matter. Their forward detachments frequently moved ahead of the enemy rear guard, and at times it was very difficult to figure out the position of the troops. The successful cooperation with the mobile troops was aided by the fact that the assault planes, in knowing the situation, could orient themselves well in the dynamics of battle and were able to recognize their troops. The following episode is characteristic in this regard.

Two groups of six airplanes from the 2d Guards shad under the command of Sr Lts I. B. Borbatenko and N. I. Gribov had taken off to destroy enemy troops at the point of Baraniy Rog. With the approach of the assault planes to the command post of the commander of the 1st Guards Tank Corps it became known that the offensive of the tank units had been halted by strong enemy artillery fire. The commander of the air division, in being at this command post,

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radioed Guardsman Gribov to reconnoiter and locate the enemy artillery in the region of Chernyye Brody. Soon the group commander reported "We see up to an artillery battalion on the southwestern outskirts. We are attacking." By six runs the assault planes suppressed the enemy artillery in its firing positions. Our tanks resumed the attack and almost unimpeded captured the population point and railroad station of Chernyye Brody.

The bombing and strafing actions caused the enemy great losses on 25 June. At the same time, only 77 aircraft overflights were counted by the enemy while our aviation made 2,737 combat sorties, including 1,455 for bombing and strafing the enemy. During the day our aviation destroyed a great deal of enemy military equipment and personnel. In the 26 air battles, 17 enemy aircraft were shot down.

On this day the communist, the flight navigator of the 8th Guards bap, Sr Lt P. S. Tolmachev died heroically. During bombing of the crossing at Titovka, his aircraft was hit. The crew bailed out of the burning aircraft. German soldiers were running toward the landing area of the crew. In approaching the land, Tolmachev feined surrender, but when they wanted to take him alive, he killed several fascist at point-blank range and then took his own life. The residents of the village of Tazhilovich buried him.

P. S. Tolmachev was born in 1918 in the Dnepropetrovsk area in the family of a railroad worker. The leader of the squadron communists had made 78 combat sorties and had been wounded three times. Two governmental decorations embellished his chest, and for courage, valor and loyalty to the motherland he was posthumously awarded the Order of the Patriotic War, First Degree.

Upon the order of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief I. V. Stalin, on the evening of 25 June, the capital of our motherland, Moscow, saluted with artillery salvoes the valorous troops of the First Belorussian Front which had broken through the Nazi defenses on the Bobruysk sector. In the order for excellent combat actions thanks were stated to the troops of the front, including to the fliers: Col Gen Avn S. I. Rudenko, Lt Gen Avn A. S. Osipenko, Maj Gens Avn G. O. Komarov, I. V. Krupskiy, G. F. Baydukov, I. M. Dzusev and A. Z. Karabatskiy, Col's S. N. Chirva, P. A. Kalinin, I. I. Ivanov, V. V. Sukhoryabov and M. Kh. Borisenko, and Lt Col's D. S. Sherstyuk and K. I. Rasskazov.

The effectiveness of the operations of the air units in the 16th AA can be seen from the statements of prisoners of war: "On 24 June in the region of Rogovoy and Gorokhov, Russian bombers, regardless of the very close distance to the battle formations of their infantry, with exceptional accuracy bombed our positions. As a result only 20 remained out of the 70 men in the company." "In this offensive, as never before, Russian aviation conquered the air. Previously mainly the infantry battle formations and the artillery firing positions had been subjected to bombing. But in these battles the rear subunits also were not safe; it became impossible for transport to move



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over the roads. The Russian assault planes and fighters continuously bombed and strafed us with machine gun and cannon fire."

One of the prisoners of the 616th air division stated: "On this offensive we felt the force and might of Russian aviation. Our firing positions located to the west of Ozerane, as a result of a single pass by a small group of bombers, were destroyed. The soldiers grew indignant and cursed Goebbels who in 1941 had declared to the entire world that Russian aviation had perished."

On 26 June, in the area of the northern assault group of the front, the 9th Tank Corps was committed for completing the breakthrough of the enemy defenses. By the end of the day the corps had reached the Berezina River. The troops of the southern assault group had rapidly advanced around Bobruysk from the southwest. The enemy in both areas of the breakthrough had begun to pull back its troops.

The air formations of the 16th AA continued to aid the northern group of the troops from the front in developing its success, they supported the troops which had encircled the enemy grouping in the region of Bobruysk, and continuously hung over the retreating Nazi troops.

During the night the 242d and 271st nbad in operating as single aircraft prevented enemy traffic over roads to the northeast and southeast of Bobruysk. They made 374 sorties.

During the day bombers from the 3d bak and 6th sak, having made 338 sorties, destroyed the enemy on the battlefield, along the roads from the front to Bobruysk and in regions of troop concentrations in the area of the offensive of the 48th and 3d armies. By divebombing the bombers of the 3d bak destroyed the crossings over the Berezina River to the east of Bobruysk and the exit switches to the west of the Bobruysk railroad junction. The assault aviation in group strikes destroyed the retreating enemy columns on roads and in places of concentrations, and also destroyed the crossings over the Berezina and carried out air reconnaissance. Simultaneously with this, the 4th shak, the 2d Guards and the 299th shad escorted the 9th and 1st Guards Tank Corps and the CMG which had been thrown into the breach. As a total the assault planes made 858 sorties. The fighters covered the advancing troops of the front, they supported the actions of the bombers and assault planes, and by "free hunting" strafed the retreating enemy troops and conducted reconnaissance, carrying out 1,373 sorties during the day.

The commanders of the air squadrons which were cooperating with the troops were located at the observation posts of their commanders, having the necessary means for controlling aviation over the battlefield. In the troop formations of the first echelon, as a rule, were representatives of the air divisions, the air spotters; they guided their aviation to the necessary targets. Here is one of the many examples.

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Around midday on 26 June, the guidance radio of the 299th shad transmitted to the commander of the group of assault planes Maj V. I. Seliverstov: "Humpbacks, hit the accumulation of troops and vehicles on the northern outskirts of Ozemli and along the roads to the west of the railroad." Having made certain from the password that this was actually the guidance station of the division, Maj Seliverstov accepted the command and the entire group successfully attacked the designated target from an altitude of 850 meters in a dive. After each pass the guidance station affirmed the correctness of the actions, and after the fifth pass transmitted: "Excellent work, go home, a second group is to replace you."

Particularly successful were the joint actions of the assault planes from the 2d Guards and the 299th shad with the CMG. Here the air representatives, in having radio stations at the observation posts of the formation commanders, ensured the rapid summoning of the assault planes and the effectiveness of their strikes against the enemy. Proof of this can be the response by the chief of the political department from the 4th Guards Cavalry Corps, Col M. F. Karev: "The aviation supporting the corps did good work. On 26 June, groups of our assault planes and fighters continuously replaced each other in the air, and they caused great losses to the enemy and covered the units enemy and covered the units of the corps from the air. From the experience of battles as part of other fronts, we had not seen such well organized air operations."

Along with improving the cooperation between the aviation and troops in the Belorussian Operation, the forms of cooperation between the bombers and fighters also changed. They began to rendezvous not in a circle over the fighter airfield but rather on a leg of the route toward the target. Such a method required the clearer organization of take-offs and the precise observance of the time reckoning along the route. But on the other hand the range of the bombers was increased as well as the time they could remain over the target.

As a result of the successful actions by the air-supported troops of the front, the enemy on 26 June began a general retreat. Along all the roads to Bobruysk stretched enemy troops columns with military equipment. They became the basic objective of the operations of our aviation. At midday, in the area of the offensive of the 65th Army, an air scout detected an enemy column of up to 600 motor vehicles. Its destruction was entrusted to the commander of the 300th shad who took off with 44 Il-2 aircraft. The assault planes used the tactics of wave attacks in small groups. For almost 2 hours they kept the column under bombing and firing, having destroyed more than 100 motor vehicles and a significant number of personnel. As a result, the column was halted and broken up.

By the end of the third day of the offensive, the troops from the northern group had outflanked the Bobruysk grouping from the north, while the troops of the southern group had cut off the retreat routes for the enemy to the west. The Bobruysk enemy grouping was threatened with complete encirclement.

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The 16th AA on 26 June made 2,950 combat sorties. In 29 air battles, 13 German aircraft were shot down. Our units lost 19 aircraft. As a result of the systematic bombing and strafing attacks against enemy troops on the roads and the crossings over the Berezina to the east of Bobruysk, the enemy was unable to completely pull back its forces and equipment to the western bank. The bridge to the east of Bobruysk was damaged by nine Pe-2 from the 34th bap (the leading pilot, Lt Col V. A. Novikov and navigator Maj M. S. Monov).

On 27 June, the troops of the front, in developing the offensive with active air support, in mobile groups emerged to the northwest of Bobruysk and completed the encirclement of the Bobruysk garrison and the enemy grouping to the southeast of the town. A total of up to 40,000 German troops were taken in the two encirclements.

During the night of 27 June and in the first half of the day, bomber and assault plane formations destroyed enemy troop concentrations in the ring of encirclement and the retreating motor columns along the roads to Osipovich and Slutsk.

The high pace of the offensive and the complex maneuvering of our troops under the conditions of the forested and swampy terrain as well as the retreat of the demoralized enemy required continuous air reconnaissance. In such a situation only by using it was it possible to establish the location of our forward units and discover the enemy's maneuvers.

At 0800 hours, the commander of the 1st Guards Tank Corps requested that the assault planes supporting him reconnoiter several roads. This mission was radioed to the commander of eight IIs, Guards Lt V. F. Kolennikov. He soon reported: "The Bobruysk--Staryye Dorogi highway is clear. An enemy motor column is moving from Bobruysk to Osipovich. I am attacking." Having made three passes and expended all the ammunition, the group of assault planes returned to the airfield.

At 0950 hours, the scout of the 241st bad, Hero of the Soviet Union Capt N. S. Musinskiy radioed that along the highway from Yasen' to Osipovich was moving a column with up to 500 motor vehicles. By a decision of the air division commander, the bombers attacked the column in two groups of ten planes near the population point of Kos'ye and three groups at Yasen', having destroyed a large number of enemy motor vehicles. Here the group of Capt F. I. Parshin distinguished itself. On 26 October 1944, the air squadron commander of the 128th bap, Capt F. I. Parshin, was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. By this time he had 210 successful combat sorties.

Another column moving from Bortniki to Titovka was attacked by assault planes from the 199th shad. The first attack by five groups of six Il aircraft from the 569th shap was made at 0900 hours; then came three groups of six planes at 1500 hours. These attacks against the enemy which

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was endeavoring to break out from the region of Titovka to Bobruysk provided tangible support to the 9th Tank Corps. As a result up to 200 vehicles and a large number of enemy soldiers were destroyed. Moreover, the aviation crushed up to 600 motor vehicles, 40 tanks and 450 carts in the region of Dubovka.

A group of nine Pe-2 from the 24th bap headed by Hero of the Soviet Union Capt P. A. Del'tsov was sent to destroy the railroad bridge across the Berezhina at Bobruysk, and this was the only bridge connecting the two banks. On the second pass by the nine planes, as a result of a direct hit by a 250-kg bomb, one of the girders of the bridge collapsed into the water. The lid on the Bobruysk trap was banged shut. However at the moment of pulling out from the dive, the aircraft of Capt P. A. Del'tsov was damaged by antiaircraft fire and became uncontrollable. The crew bailed out. Del'tsov succeeded in taking cover in a nearby forest, but navigator A. V. Timofeyev and gunner-radio operator V. I. Popruga perished heroically in a duel with the fascists at the point of landing.

During the second half of the day of 27 June, air reconnaissance and other types of reconnaissance of the front affirmed the complete encirclement of the large grouping (up to six divisions) of fascist invaders to the southeast of Bobruysk by the Soviet troops. Being under continuous attack by our ground forces and aviation, the encircled enemy grouping began to concentrate in the population points of Savichi, Telusha, Stupeni and Dubovka and in the adjacent forests. The fascists brought up a large number of tanks, guns, motor vehicles and infantry into this region. They undertook a series of counterattacks and prepared to break out along the Zhlobin--Bobruysk road for the purpose of escaping from the trap. The enemy grouping which was concentrated on a small area of terrain still possessed significant combat strength and during the night could break out of the encirclement. There was little time for preventing the enemy from realizing its plans as not more than 3 hours remained until darkness. A heavy attack had to be made immediately against the encircled enemy for completely defeating it.

The troop commander of the First Belorussian Front together with the representatives from Headquarters, Mar SU G. K. Zhukov and Chief Mar Avn A. A. Novikov, decided to entrust this mission to the 16th AA. About 1800 hours, Gen Arm K. K. Rokossovskiy gave the mission to Col Gen Avn S. I. Rudenko to make a rapid and powerful attack against the Bobruysk enemy grouping.

The time from 1900 to 2100 hours was allocated for the air operations. The troops of the front received instructions to clearly delimit their forward edge along the perimeter of the front of encirclement.

Upon the order from the commander of the 16th AA, 526 aircraft took off to destroy the enemy grouping to the southeast of Bobruysk. This included 175 bombers, 217 assault planes and 134 fighters. The air corps and detached air divisions were given their missions personally by the commander and the chief of staff of the air army. The commanders of the

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air corps and divisions were initially given a preliminary combat disposition: "Immediately bring your formations to a state of combat readiness and prepare to receive a mission to destroy the enemy troops encircled to the southeast of Bobruysk." Then the formations received the following missions.

"The 3d bak and the 6th bak in bomber groups without fighter escort are to destroy the enemy troop and equipment concentrations in the region of... (the points were listed). Bombing was to be carried out following the leader in a flight from a horizontal flight at altitudes of 1,200-1,600 meters in close series against the detected enemy concentrations and in long series over forests and copses where the enemy trains, personnel and equipment can be concealed. In bombing forests the elements are to be formed widely along the front for covering the entire area of the designated region. The groups are to take off immediately upon readiness. It is to be kept in mind that at the same time the assault planes will be operating below and these are not to be impeded, and for avoiding hitting them when necessary repeated passes are to be made or the enemy bombed in another region.

"The 4th shak, the 2d Guards and the 299th shad, in groups of assault planes without fighter escort are to destroy enemy troop and equipment accumulations in the area of...(designated for the bombers). Along with dropping antitank bombs against tanks and assault guns, cannon and machine gun fire is to be widely used against personnel. Operational height from 600 to 400 meters before diving. The groups of assault planes are to remain as long as possible over the target, in making several passes each. With the appearance of bombers in the target region and with the opening of antiaircraft fire against them by the enemy, the assault planes are to suppress the discovered antiaircraft points. It is to be kept in mind that in this region the bombers will be operating simultaneously at a greater altitude.

"The 283d, 286th and 1st Guards iad in elements and groups of four-six aircraft each are to support the operations of the bombers and assault planes by bordering the region of the encircled enemy grouping by continuous fighter patrolling stacked at altitudes from 500 to 2,000 meters. In the absence of enemy fighters in this region they are permitted to strafe enemy troops and equipment with cannon and machine gun fire."<sup>1</sup>

As Mar Avn S. I. Rudenko has recalled, the entire assigning of missions to the air formations for the attack against the Bobruysk trap took just from 9 to 15 minutes. Here one could feel the high readiness as well as the excellent organization and teamwork of the AA staff which was headed by the indefatigable and active Gen P. I. Brayko and the staffs of the air formations.

In the second half of this day the activities of enemy aviation were low. Fighters appeared rarely in elements and groups of four-six aircraft and did not put up serious resistance to our aviation.

<sup>1</sup> Arkhiv MO SSSR, folio 368, inv. 6476, file 405, sheets 6-8; file 406, sheets 6-7.

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The weather favored the operations of our air units. The summer sun was sinking to the horizon. The first bomber groups appeared at 1915 hours over the Nazis caught in the Bobruysk trap. The encircled enemy troops protected themselves with a hail of antiaircraft fire. The assault plane groups which hurried up immediately began to neutralize the enemy antiaircraft weapons. Not an hour past before the enemy antiaircraft fire had almost stopped. The bomber groups from the first run began to bomb the detected enemy concentrations on the roads of Stupeni--Dubovka, Telusha--Savichi and the adjacent forests. The assault planes made bombing and strafing strikes first of all at the head of the enemy column (to the north of Dubovka), where the tanks and assault guns were concentrated. The air strike against the surrounded grouping of Nazi troops was a surprise and crushing. Bombers and assault planes group after group approached the target area. Certain groups formed a line in order to descend on the Nazi invaders with all their firepower after the departure of the previous groups.

As a result of the bombing and the cannon and machine gun firing great explosions occurred at points where military equipment had accumulated and large fires were formed. Clouds of black smoke rose to an altitude of 300-400 meters. Tanks and motor vehicles with the painted crosses caught fire, and ammunition and loaded fuel trucks exploded. The Nazi horde was seized with panic.

As was later learned from the data of our troops and statements by German prisoners, during the first minutes of the air raid, as a result of the numerous fires which broke out after the bomb and rocket explosions, a caustic smoke spread. The Nazis in a panic thought this was a poison gas and putting on gas masks, began to flee. Many vehicle and wagon drivers endeavored from the woods into openings, but here they came under the cannon and machine gun fire from our assault planes and fighters. Some endeavored to save themselves by driving off the roads, but here they got stuck in the swamp or hit stumps. A portion of the enemy tanks and vehicles continued to move northwest along the roads, but inevitably were attacked by our aviation. Piles of destroyed and burning equipment were formed on the roads. In hoping to escape from the fiery hell, the vehicle drivers drove onto the railroad embankment which was 3-5 meters tall and endeavored to make their way along the railroad toward Bobruysk.

One hour after the explosion of the first bombs, the concentration areas of enemy troops and equipment were covered with dense clouds of smoke and dust and this impeded the subsequent actions of our aviation.

As a result of the concentrated strike by our aviation, control over the enemy troops was completely disrupted. They totally lost their battle-worthiness. Reconnaissance pilots related how horses and soldiers in terror were dashing along the roads and through the forests, among the trees and swamps, and how the German tanks, motor vehicles and carts moved chaotically in different directions. The crazed fascists abandoned equipment, weapons and plundered things and fled through the forests and copses

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toward the Berezina, where under the cover of the dark night they swam across to Bobruysk. Many of them did not reach the opposite bank and drowned, while those who did make it across were captured as the troops of the 65th Army had already reached the western bank of the Berezina.

Here is how Mar SU G. K. Zhukov recreated the picture of this defeat in his book "Vospominaniya i Razmyshleniya" [Remembrances and Reflections].

"I saw how the Germans were defeated to the southeast of it (Bobruysk, author's). Hundreds of bombers from the 16th Army of S. I. Rudenko, in coordinating with the 48th Army, made strike after strike against the enemy group. Fires broke out on the battlefield and many scores of vehicles and tanks and fuels and lubricants caught fire. The entire battlefield was engulfed in a raging fire. In being guided by it, constantly new waves of our bombers flew over dropping various caliber bombs. The German soldiers, as if crazed, fled in all directions and those who did not wish to be captured were killed there. Hundreds and thousands of German soldiers perished, deceived by Hitler who had promised them a lightning victory over the USSR."

The bomb attack by the 16th AA was ended when evening fell. In the places of the accumulation of enemy military equipment, long after explosions rang out and large fires flared up. As a total during the 90 minutes our aviation had dropped against the enemy troops and equipment some 1,127 high explosive bombs of 100- and 50-kg caliber, 4,897 fragmentation bombs with a caliber of 25, 10 and 8 kg, 5,326 antitank bombs and had released 572 rockets, 27,880 cannon shells and 45,440 machine gun cartridges. The area which had been subjected to bombing was turned into a graveyard of enemy corpses and destroyed equipment.

A special commission with the aid of aerial photography and an investigation established that the concentrated air strike in the trap to the southeast of Bobruysk had destroyed and damaged up to 150 tanks and assault guns, around 1,000 guns of various caliber, up to 6,000 motor vehicles, up to 300 tractors and 3,000 wagons; more than 1,000 enemy soldiers and officers had been destroyed and up to 1,500 horses; about 5,500 soldiers and officers lost their units. On the site of the defeat of the fascist horde much captured equipment remained.

The concentrated air strike by the forces of the 526 aircraft was made without any losses due to the precise execution of the set mission by the flight crews, their high discipline and circumspection. The high effectiveness of the weapons used was achieved as a result of precision bombing, the correct choice of the type of bombs according to the nature of the target and the wide use of cannon and machine gun fire by the assault planes and fighters.

After the air raid, the troops of the 48th Army, in going over to the offensive for the purpose of liquidating the demoralized and surrounded grouping, did not encounter organized resistance from the enemy with the

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exception of individual groups which were in remote forests and had not been exposed to our aviation. The strike by the 16th AA played the primary role in the defeat of this grouping. As a whole, the actions of the aviation to destroy the enemy troops encircled to the south of Bobruysk can be viewed as an independent air operation. Here the basic forces of the 9th Nazi Army were destroyed.

All the commanders of the air regiments, the divisions and corps which participated in the raid were commended by the Deputy Supreme Commander-in-Chief, Mar SU G. K. Zhukov. Gen S. I. Rudenko was presented a gold watch.

Chief Mar Avn A. A. Novikov had high praise for the actions of the air formations of the 16th AA. In a telegram sent to the participants in the defeat of the enemy, he noted that the air units had carried out their mission excellently, and thanks were expressed to all the personnel which participated in the concentrated strike.

During 27 June, the VNOS posts of the front air defenses counted only 122 overflights by enemy aircraft. The air units of the 16th AA made 1,803 sorties.

Over the 4-5 days of offensive battles, the troops of the First Belorussian Front pierced the enemy defenses on a 200-km front, they encircled and destroyed the enemy Bobruysk grouping and advanced to a depth of up to 110 km. By the third-fourth day of the operation, certain air units had to be re-based behind the advancing troops. Two operations groups were sent out to locate airfields from the army airfield service. Having the necessary transport and communications, they immediately examined the airfields abandoned by the enemy, they sought out new areas and built new airfields using the forces of the airfield engineering battalions.

Mar Avn S. I. Rudenko, in recalling the conditions for the basing of aviation in the Bobruysk Operation, gave the following episode. The CMG in entering the breach and advancing in the direction of the population point of Staryye Dorogi, occupied the airfield of Pastovichi. At this time the front line ran significantly to the east and Bobruysk was still in enemy hands. For supporting the actions of the CMG, assault planes and fighters had to land at Pastovichi airfield. But it was unknown whether or not the enemy had mined the airfield. For clarifying the situation, sappers were sent out on two Po-2 aircraft. The airplanes landed by a neighboring village. The sappers examined the airfield and not having detected any mines gave the agreed-upon signal. Then several transports took off. They delivered the service personnel and the necessary support equipment to the Pastovichi airfield. Then two squadrons of assault planes and bombers were moved there. They also arrived to support the CMG. In subsequent days, the air support group was reinforced and for some time together with the mobile formations conducted combat in being based, in essence, in the enemy rear.



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During 28-30 June, the troops of the front, having destroyed the remains of the enemy grouping which had been routed by the heavy air strike to the southeast of Bobruysk and in pursuing the retreating enemy, developed the offensive toward Mar'ina Gorka and Slutsk. Considering such favorable conditions for new strikes against the enemy, Headquarters on 28 June ordered the First Belorussian Front with the basic forces to advance on Baranovich, cutting off the enemy's route of retreat to the southwest and with a portion of the forces to advance toward Minsk, completing the encirclement of the Minsk grouping of Nazi troops in cooperating with the troops of the Third Belorussian Front.

The 16th AA, on 28-30 June, using single aircraft from the 6th sak during the night bombed the retreating German columns in the regions of Pukhovichi and Mar'ina Gorka, and prevented the movement of enemy troops along the Minsk--Slutsk highway.

During the day groups of assault planes from the 4th shak destroyed enemy troops to the southwest of Bobruysk and on its eastern edge. Fliers from the 2d Guards and 299th shad attacked enemy troops in the regions of Bobruysk and on the roads to Pukhovichi and Slutsk; the 299th shad is assault plane groups attacked three railroad trains at Slutsk station as well as enemy troops. This helped the CMG capture the town of Slutsk.

The 6th and 8th iak, the 283d and 286th iad escorted bombers and assault planes and in groups of six-eight fighters provided cover for the battle formations of the troops of the front, and in addition conducted reconnaissance and "free hunting."

Simultaneously the air formations of the 16th AA upon instructions from the representative of Headquarters, assisted the troops of the Second Belorussian Front. On 28-30 June, the 3d bak and the 4th shak under fighter escort destroyed the crossings near Berezino and attacked enemy troop concentrations at the crossings, on the Pogost--Berezino--Cherven' road and in the regions of Berezino, Leshnitsa, Novoselki and Cherven'. On 29 June in bombing the bridge at Berezino, particularly distinguished actions were carried out by the groups where the leaders were the flier from the 24th bap Capt R. S. Suleymanov with the navigator Sr Lt P. A. Kozlenko (on 15 May 1946, he was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union), as well as the flier from the 128th bap Sr Lt Yu. V. Khilkov and the navigator Maj N. D. Lepekhin. The bridge was destroyed by a direct bomb hit. The only route of escape for the units of the enemy 4th Army was cut.

The 1st Guards iad, in addition to escorting the 3d bak, on 28 June attacked an enemy motor column on the Berezino--Cherven' road in three groups of 12 airplanes each. This mission was excellently carried out by the groups of the 55th Guards iap under the command of Hero of the Soviet Union Guards Lt Col V. I. Shishkin and Guards Capt A. D. Kucheryavyy. They crushed the column by machine gun and cannon fire, having completely disrupted the retreat of the enemy troops.

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As a total, the 16th AA on 28-30 June made 1,683 sorties, including around 650 sorties in the interests of the troops of the adjacent front. As a result of bombing and strafing attacks, the enemy lost a large number of military equipment, motor vehicles and personnel. In the 29 air battles, 21 enemy aircraft were shot down. The air operations weakened the resistance of the demoralized enemy, they prevented its retreat, they created conditions for the rapid advancement of the mobile units of the front and impeded the attacks of the enemy to dig in on the intermediate lines.

On 28 June, Moscow saluted the valorous forces of the First Belorussian Front which had liberated the town of Osipovichi. On 29 June they cleared Bobruysk of fascists. In the battles for this powerful strongpoint of German defenses, the ground forces and the fliers of the 8th iak, the 3d bak, the 299th and 2d Guards shad, the 4th shak, the 6th sak and the 288d iad distinguished themselves. Thanks were declared to the flight personnel of these formations by an order from the Supreme Commander-in-Chief.

During 1-4 July, the 16th AA, in making from 300 to 700 sorties daily, carried out the following missions: The 4th shak, under the cover of the 286th iad, continued to operate in the interests of the 3d and 48th armies against the battle formations and artillery of the enemy to the northeast of Osipovichi, against troop concentrations in the region of Smilovichi and on the Berezino--Cherven' road, simultaneously assisting the 1st Guards and 9th tank corps. The 3d bak attacked enemy troops which were impeding the drive on Minsk. The 6th iak covered the troops and aviation operating on the Minsk sector. In the same sector attacks were made against enemy troops on the roads by the night bombers of the 271st nbad and the 6th sak. The 2d Guards shad and the 283d iad continued to operate in the interests of the 65th Army and the CMG. The 8th iak provided air superiority in the zone of their operations. The 6th sak destroyed the railroad stations and hit trains between Starushki and Mikashevichi.

Enemy aviation somewhat increased its activities; on these days 140-170 aircraft overflights per day were counted.

The troops of the First Belorussian Front with air support, in pursuing the retreating enemy and in overcoming its stubborn resistance, on 2 July liberated Stolbtsy, Gorodeya, Nesvizh and reached the region of Minsk, having cut off the enemy's line of retreat and having created the prerequisites for encircling the large enemy troop grouping numbering over 100,000 men. On 3 July, Moscow on behalf of the motherland saluted the troops of the Third and First Belorussian fronts, including the units of the 16th AA which had distinguished themselves in liberating the capital of Belorussia, Minsk.

The success of the Bobruysk Operation was largely predetermined by the active operations of the 16th AA. From 24 June through 4 July, the AA air units in the Bobruysk sector made 13,784 combat sorties, they conducted 141 air battles, shooting down 94 enemy aircraft. The bomb strikes

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caused great losses for the Nazi invaders. During these days just 1,144 aircraft overflights were recorded for enemy aviation.<sup>1</sup>

In the course of the Bobruysk Operation, the air formations of the 16th AA successfully carried out the missions confronting them.

Here, for example, is how the combat operations of the 199th shad were viewed by the commander of the 9th Tank Corps: "The shad from 24 through 29 June, in cooperating with the tank corps, excellently carried out all the assignments from the tank troops. Due to the bold and able actions of the pilots, the shad helped the corps check the Zhlobin-Rogachev enemy grouping, and then together with the corps to destroy this grouping piecemeal in its attempt to break through to Bobruysk. We must particularly commend the precise execution of the missions with the on-time take-off and precise bombing of the designated targets."

Other air formations also received good comments on air operations from the military councils of the armies. In recalling the combat of the CMG in the Belorussian Operation, Gen Arm I. A. Pliyev in the collection "Osvobozhdeniye Belorussii" has written: "In all stages the successful operations of the CMG to a significant degree were ensured by the dependable cover and support from our aviation.... Some 12-16 assault planes escorted the cavalry and tank troops, suppressing individual Nazi centers of resistance along the way. On the roads, crossings and in other narrow places, air strikes created blockages, they thwarted the planned retreat of the enemy, turning the enemy into a chaotic and frequently panic flight."

In the battles for the liberation of Belorussia from the fascist invaders, the personnel of the AA demonstrated high moral and political qualities and combat enthusiasm, mass heroism and the ability to destroy the enemy.

The actions of the fliers from the 67th Guards iap of the 273d iad can serve as one of the many examples of the high combat skill and unprecedented heroism. On 30 June, Guards Sr Lt V. P. Alekseyev in an element with the Komsomol member Guards Jr Lt V. D. Berezin, in escorting bombers, encountered enemy fighters which were endeavoring to break through to the formation of Pe-2. In the ensuing battle, Alekseyev shot down one FW-190, while Berezin bagged two fighters, but, in being attacked by an element of Fokker-Wulfs, he was separated from his commander. An enemy shell exploded in the cockpit. Fragments wounded Berezin in the head and arm. Control of the aircraft was disrupted and the gunsight did not work. The flier in the damaged aircraft losing altitude returned toward his territory. Immediately the two fascist fighters dove on the stricken aircraft and endeavored to fire on it from a short range. Berezin reduced speed and forced one Fokker-Wulf to overshoot him and shot him down. Then the wounded Soviet flier landed on

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<sup>1</sup> Arkhiv MO SSSR, folio 368, inv. 6476, file 353, sheets 89-90, 94-95; file 359, sheets 6, 128-130.

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a partisan airfield. There he was given medical aid. Barezin turned over his fighter to the partisans for safekeeping and soon returned to the unit.

Such examples show the combat enthusiasm and patriotic upsurge among the personnel of the units. In the 2d Guards shad, the fliers and gunners who were not assigned for a combat sortie constantly asked the commander to send them out to strafe the enemy. The young fliers from the 352d iap, Jr Lts P. D. Volchenko, A. P. Kamelin and V. P. Karpezin stated: "We are little sent out to combat. We will be assumed to have just 5-10 combat sorties by the end of the war." The engineering and technical personnel of the air units who unstintingly supported the combat sorties showed true labor heroism.

During the period of the Belorussian Operation, hundreds of aviators submitted applications to the party and Komsomol organizations with a request for admission to the Lenin Komsomol and the Communist Party. As a rule these were the best fliers, technicians and mechanics who had set the example in combat work. In his application for admission to the party, the flier of the 657th shap, Jr Lt M. I. Ivanov who the day before had received the Order of the Red Banner for bravery, wrote that he would justify the high title of a communist and would mercilessly crush the fascist beast until its complete destruction. In all the air units a group of communists and Komsomol members developed and they by their example inspired the men to better carry out the missions. From 24 June through 10 August, 271 persons were admitted as members of the VKP)b) and 212 persons were admitted as candidate members in the army.

The Soviet government had high praise for the combat feats of the aviators. By the Ukase of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet of 1 July 1944, the honorary title of Hero of the Soviet Union was awarded to 13 famed pilots and navigators of the 16th AA for the exemplary fulfillment of the combat missions of the command and for courage and valor. These included: Capt A. A. Anpilov, Sr Lt N. M. Balakirev, Maj V. F. Volkov, Lt Ye. I. Gubin, Sr Lts Yu. N. Zykov (posthumously), A. S. Kobisskoy and I. V. Maslov, Lt Col A. G. Nakonechnikov, Lt A. A. Nemtinov, Capt N. A. Rozhnov, Sr Lt M. I. Rumyantsev, Lt Col M. G. Sklyarov and Capt N. D. Sukhov. Many in subsequent engagements carried out a number of other feats. Some of them are continuing to serve in the Soviet Army and are indoctrinating a new generation of aviators.

For example, take Hero of the Soviet Union Anatoliy Andreyevich Anpilov. He was born in a worker family in 1914 in Staryy Oskol. As a youth of 15 he joined the Komsomol. In 1936, he completed the Odessa Flight School. He received his baptism under fire in the war against the White Finns, where he successfully made 36 combat sorties. He became a participant of the Great Patriotic War from its first days and was soon thereafter the squadron commander of the 779th bap. He was a member of the Communist Party from 1943. In combat he proved to be a brave and decisive commander. He indoctrinated his subordinates by a personal example of flying skill

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and loyalty to the motherland. During the war Anpilov carried out 193 combat sorties in a bomber and was wounded twice. He received many orders and medals for excellent execution of combat missions. After the war he successfully completed the Red Banner Air Force Academy, and commanded an air regiment and an air division. At present Maj Gen Avn Anpilov holds the position of the deputy air commander of a district.

The deputy air squadron commander of the 157th iap of the 234th iad Lt I. V. Maslov was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union for successfully carrying out 285 combat sorties, in the course of which he won 19 victories in 60 battles. The navigator of the 217th shap Capt N. A. Rozhnov in 94 combat sorties destroyed 31 tanks, 3 aircraft in dogfights and 49 guns and mortars. To the combat score of the squadron commander of the 218th shap, Sr Lt N. M. Balakirev, the deputy squadron commander of the 218th shap, Sr Lt M. I. Rummyantsev, the senior pilot from the same regiment, Lt Ye. I. Gubin and the assistant commander of the 79th Guards shap, Lt A. A. Nemtirov (on 6 October 1944 he did not return from a combat mission) were 85-106 combat sorties, while the deputy squadron commander of the 44th Guards nbap, Capt N. D. Dukhov, had 672 combat sorties.

In the Battles for Liberating the Western Regions of Belorussia and Eastern Poland

The defeat of the enemy groupings in the region of Bobruysk and Minsk led to the formation of an enormous breach in the defenses of the Nazi troops. Proceeding from this, on 4 July Headquarters ordered the troops of the right wing of the First Belorussian Front to continue the offensive on Baranovich and Brest, and capture bridgeheads on the western bank of the Western Bug River.

On the following day, the troops of the front, in developing the offensive, encountered fierce resistance from the enemy on the approaches to the strong defensive center of Baranovich. The Nazi troops had received several fresh divisions of reinforcements. Enemy aviation also significantly increased its operations.

The advancing troops of the front were supported by all the forces of the 16th AA, however their number in the Baranovich sector significantly declined in July. The 6th sak, the 242d nbap, the 1st Guards iad, the 299th shad and the 19th iap during the period of 3-9 July, the 283d iad and the 300th shad on 12-15 July, and the 3d bak on 23 July were rebased to airfields to the south of the Poles'ye for aiding the troops on the left wing of the First Belorussian Front and became part of the 6th AA. The 196th shad from 12 July was transferred to the reserve of the army. On 18 July, around 770 battle-ready crews remained for supporting and covering the troops on the right wing of the front.

During 5-10 July, the air formations of the 16th AA, in cooperating with the troops of the 65th and 28th armies and the CMG, continued to pursue the retreating enemy and by bombing and strafing attacks cleared the way for the offensive of the troops of the front.

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In aiding the troops in the defeat of the Baranovichi enemy grouping, the 2nd Guards shad and the 4th shak in small groups under the cover of fighters from the 283d and 286th iad and the 6th iak, as well as single planes from the 271st nbad destroyed enemy artillery in positions, motor transport on the roads, personnel and equipment in the region of Polonechka, Lyakhoviche, Byten' and Slonim, railroad trains at the stations of Matseyuv and Les'na, and destroyed the crossings over the Myshanka River to the west of Baranovichi. Here groups of assault planes from the 78th Guards shap under the command of Hero of the Soviet Union Guards Capt V. L. Volgin, Guards Sr Lts N. I. Gribov and I. B. Gorbatenko and Capt V. N. Mochalov (on 23 February 1945, he was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union for carrying out 135 effective combat sorties) fought excellently.

The 8th and 6th iak escorted assault planes, they covered the battle formations of the troops, they reconnoitered the enemy positions, they strafed the Baranovichi airfield and as "hunter" groups fought fascist aviation.

Operational air reconnaissance was carried out by the 16th odrap in the Brest sector and by the 72d orap on the Lublin sector.

During the decisive days of the struggle for the town of Baranovichi, our aviation each day made 300-500 sorties, and on 7 July, 769 sorties.

On 8 July, having crushed the stubborn enemy resistance, the troops of the front with air support captured the fortified area and town of Baranovichi, and on 10 July liberated Slonim. Thanks were declared in an order of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief to the fliers of the 6th and 8th iak, the 2d Guards and 199th shad, the 283d iad and the 16th odrap. On 14 July, on the occasion of the liberation of Pinsk, fliers from the 336th iad and the 3d Guards shad received thanks.

Under the blows of our troops, the enemy quickly retreated to the west, constantly fearing encirclement.

The operations of the air units of the 16th AA during this period had the nature of an air pursuit of the enemy in the general direction of Brest. A particular feature of the use of the assault planes in the course of pursuing the enemy was the continuous operation against enemy troops with small groups of planes. Here a well organized cooperation between aviation and the troops was maintained. The air representatives were in the battle formations of the forward detachments and guided the assault plane groups by radio. Actions by elements of "hunter" assault planes were also widely used. With a favorable air situation the fighters strafed the Nazi troops on the roads.

The AA, regardless of the frequent rebasings, in all instances maintained air superiority and effectively supported the ground troops on the offensive. According to a statement from a captured flier from the 9th Detachment of the 1st Assault Squadron shot down on 9 July in the region of Baranovichi, the Germans were amazed not only by our quantitative superiority but also by the increased combat skill of the flight personnel, particularly

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the fighters, with which even with equal forces they did not always decide to engage in air combat. He admitted: "Complete superiority of the Russians reigns in the air."

In pursuing the retreating enemy, one of the important missions of the assault planes and fighters was to disrupt the operations of enemy railroad communications. Thus, on 12 July five IIs from the 783d shap led by Maj A. I. Sarychev made a bombing and strafing attack against a train between Volkovysk and Andreyevichi. The group attacked the train from the front, having damaged the locomotive by machine gun fire. In subsequent passes the assault planes destroyed the cars. After this the group attacked another three trains at Andreyevichi station. In a subsequent on-the-site inspection, a commission established that seven cars with ammunition and 16 cars with other equipment were destroyed, the railroad embankment was ruined, a railroad bridge was damaged and a gasoline dump destroyed.

The 271st nbad during these days was primarily occupied with ferrying fuel for the troops and aviation to the Baranovich airfield. On just 11, 12 and 14 July, Po-2 aircraft delivered 50 tons of gasoline and 19 tons of oil.

The heroic feats of the communists and Komsomol members served as an example for all the aviators of the army. On 7 July, a group of six Il-2 aircraft took off for the region of Les'na escorted by five Yak-9 from the 56th Guards iad under the command of the communist, Guards Capt A. A. Yefremov. Two groups of 20 FW-190 and Me-109 appeared over the target. Regardless of the 4-fold enemy superiority, our fighters initiated a fierce battle. They not only covered the assault planes but also boldly attacked the enemy. From two short bursts by Yefremov, the first Fokker-Wulf caught fire. The communist Guards Lt V. G. Zhilin set a second army aircraft on fire. Soon a third enemy fighter which had been hit almost at point-blank range by Guardsman Yefremov dove to the ground. After this the fascist vultures left the battle. Our fliers returned to their airfield without losses.

The communist Jr Lt Galustyan showed great courage and a desire to destroy the enemy no matter what the cost. A flight of pilots from the 171st iap attacked a German FW-189 reconnaissance plane. When the attacks did not produce the desired result, Galustyan rapidly closed in on the fascist aircraft and with a blow by the left wing knocked off the right position of the fuselage. The Rama disintegrated in the air. Galustyan bailed out of his damaged aircraft.

The leading role of the communists and Komsomol members in the battle situation is convincingly affirmed by the results of one combat day of the 323d iad. On 16 July the fliers from the iad shot down 11 fascist aircraft in air battles. The communists Lt Ye. A. Zharkov and Maj N. A. Krekhov each shot down two Fokker-Wulfs. The squadron party organizer Sr Lt A. N. Kocherga and the communist Sr Lt S. D. Burban and Jr Lt S. G. Lovyagin, and the Komsomol member Lt V. G. Kazakov each destroyed one enemy aircraft.

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Our fighters, in covering their troops, often conducted successful air combat against numerically superior enemy forces. Thus, on 7 July, four Yak-9 from the 269th iap (leader, Cpat V. D. Afanas'yev) encountered 20 FW-190 traveling with a bomb load. The Soviet fighters boldly attacked them and shot down three aircraft. Having dropped the bombs on their won troops, the enemy fliers turned back to the west.

On the morning of 9 July, the deputy commander of the 67th Guards iap, Guards Maj V. B. Loyko with his wingman were covering troops in the region of Nova Mysh' and Polonka. Soon Loyko saw six Fokker-Wulfs with bombs. Our fighters without being noticed closed in on the enemy and attacked it from behind and above. Several seconds later and one vulture had been shot down and the remainder, not accepting battle, took cover by reducing their altitude.

The Soviet military aviators carried out heroic feats and were victorious because they possessed strong combat morale and unlimited strength, loyalty to the communist ideals and a highly developed feeling of responsibility for the fate of the motherland. They were infinitely brave, courageous and resourceful, and they had excellently mastered flying skills. They had one aim--to destroy the hated enemy, and to achieve victory even, if need be, at the price of their life. With good reason combat orders decorated the chest of the aviators. Each air unit could be proud of its combat traditions, the manifestation of mass heroism and valor by the flight personnel, as well as the labor feats of the engineers, technicians and other aviation specialists.

During active combat party political work in the units grew. The results of the successful combat sorties and the names of the outstanding men were immediately made known to all the personnel. In the 946th shap, 10 minutes after the landing of the assault plane group of Sr Lt A. I. Rytov which had received thanks from the inspector of the Red Army Air Force for able actions, combat leaflets were set out to all the squadrons with the appeal: "Fliers, beat the enemy as it is beaten by the crew of Sr Lt Rytov" (subsequently he was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union).

The deputy commander for political affairs in the 59th Guards shap, Lt Col P. P. Podgurskiy, used a very vital form of visual agitation. The agitators of this air regiment immediately after the landing of the planes learned of the results of the pilots' sortie, and then the conditions of combat were plotted on diagrams, and at the parking areas of the aircraft the agitators explained in using the diagrams the skill of the pilots who had carried out their military duty in an exemplary manner. In the evening the political workers informed the personnel of the results of the regiment's operations during the day, and they told of particularly distinguished aviators, of events on the fronts, in the rear of the nation and abroad.



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The army newspaper (editor, Maj V. K. Zapol'skiy, photo reporter Sr Lt A. P. Dmitriyev) also gave great attention to the glorious deeds of the flight and technical personnel. It published articles on the combat experience of the best fliers, the navigators and the work of the mechanics, ordnancemen and drivers. In the units of the 6th iak and other air formations the political workers sent out letters to the parents of outstanding men, and they organized the presentation of gifts to young fliers who had carried out successful combat sorties.

All these measures had a beneficial effect on combat work and indoctrinated the flying and technical personnel in a spirit of the glorious combat traditions of the AA units.

The valor, intrepidity and loyalty of the aviators to their military oath can be seen from the feat of the communist, the flier of the 58th Guards shap, Sr Lt F. F. Baranov, and the Komsomol member, gunner Sgt A. Ya. Krasnil'nikov. Over the target they were attacked by eight FW-190. The crew of the red starred aircraft skillfully and courageously drove off the fascist attack. Two Fokker-Wulfs were reduced to fragments by its accurate firing. But the Nazis succeeded in hitting our Il. They had to make a forced landing on enemy-occupied territory. On the ground the Guards crew for several hours was fired on by Nazi submachinegunners and held out until the approach of Soviet tanks.

A crew of the 16th odrap consisting of the pilot Lt A. T. Lebed', the navigator Sr Lt V. A. Anisimov and the gunners Sgts S. K. Sal'nikov and I. F. Rodin showed courage and valor. Returning from a mission, at an altitude of 6,000 meters they were attacked by eight enemy fighters. Sgts Sal'nikov and Rodin, in courageously driving off one Messerschmitt, but perished in the unequal battle. Soon both motors failed. The aircraft caught on fire. The pilot and navigator who were still alive bailed out. The scouts dropped onto our territory at the very front line under the fire of enemy antiaircraft artillery. The parachute of flier Lebed' was riddled with flak and navigator Anisimov was wounded. In landing they reported very important information on the enemy to the command.

In the AA, more than a thousand fliers were saved by parachutes during the war years. Along with combat activities the command of the air formations, the units and the officers of the paratrooper service under the leadership of Lt Col A. I. Khugol' constantly carried out extensive work to save the life of flight personnel in emergency situations.

The engineer and technical personnel of the 4th shak, the 8th and 6th iak, the 3d bak, the 2d Guards and 299th shad, the 1st Guards, the 283d and 286th iad, the 16th odrap and other formations under the leadership of the chief (senior) engineers including the deputy commanders for the aviation engineering service Engr-Cols M. V. Zubarev and F. S. Petruychuk, Engr-Lt Cols P. G. Gonchar, I. S. Gudkov, D. T. Dudnik, V. S. Khazov, P. I. Chernov

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and N. Ya. Kobel'kov, Engr-Maj A. I. Shaporenko, Engr-Capt Yeroshenko and others, in working night and day on the aircraft and in repairing and fueling them under field conditions, continuously ensured the combat sorties of the fliers. The mechanics of the 2d Guards shad, the communists Sr Sgt A. A. Zaretskiy and MSgt G. N. Pechenkin during 20 days of combat serviced 40 combat sorties, they repaired 5 aircraft and replaced the motors on 2. Guards Sr Tech Lt V. A. Lyakishev (the 79th Guards shap) during a day serviced three combat sorties and quickly repaired all damage to the aircraft. There were many similar examples.

The chief of the airfield technical service of the 80th RAB Engr-Maj A. P. Pesikov and the chief of the fuels and lubricants department Sr Tech Lt V. G. Pecheyko invested particularly much labor and creative thought into supporting the operations of the assault planes. The senior engineer of the 157th iap Engr-Maj Volkov, Engr-Capt P. I. Slyusarev, Sr Tech Lt V. N. Aksenov (234th iad) and others excelled in mastering the operating of the Yak-3 aircraft. In readying the materiel for a flight, excellent work was done by the mechanics of the 133d iap MSgt G. G. Ochakovskiy, Sr Sgts G. S. Dorentsev, Strelenko and many others.

A true labor feat was performed by the military drivers of special vehicles. In the 429th bao, the gasoline truck driver Teteryuk in 8 days of work fueled 245 aircraft and transported 69 tons of fuel. In the 609th bao the fuel truck driver communist Fedorov during an intense day of combat fueled 50-70 aircraft. The Red Army drivers A. Mogil'nyy, D. Kuz'menko and others carried out the missions excellently.

By 16 July, the troops on the right wing of the First Belorussian Front, with active air support, had reached the line of Svisloch' and Pruzhany and they continued their rapid advance. Difficulties arose in supplying the air formations with ammunition and particularly fuel. The rear services of the army were extended, the supply lines had been lengthened, and the shortage of special transport was felt. In addition the Nazis had destroyed the railroads in retreating.

However, regardless of these difficulties, the air formations on the right wing of the front were promptly rebased behind the advancing troops and continuously supported them. For the 28th Army alone, the 2d Guards shad, during the period from 4 through 15 July, carried out 320 sorties for strafing and 40 sorties for reconnaissance. "By their bombing and strafing actions," wrote the chief of staff of this army, Maj Gen S. M. Rogachevskiy, "the air division destroyed tanks, armored vehicles, artillery in firing positions, motor transport and enemy infantry and significantly assisted the troops of the army in defeating the enemy and capturing the town of Baranovich. The operations of the assault planes and the coordination between the army and assault division were well organized."

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In carrying out the missions, the pilots always showed comradely mutual aid. Thus an element of Yaks headed by Guards Capt G. D. Tokarev (116th Guards IAP), in escorting assault planes, on the way to the target encountered eight FW-190 fighters. Our pilots boldly engaged the enemy. Pilot Tokarev met the Fokker-Wulfs with precise fire and immediately shot down two enemy aircraft. His wingman Guards Lt A. P. Zhuravel' skillfully covered his commander. But soon a fascist had succeeded in damaging the aircraft of the wingman and this forced it out of combat. Guardsman Tokarev continued to fight alone. Other fliers Lts I. F. Galinskiy and A. F. Tselkovikov who were escorting another group of assault planes spotted the unequal air battle. These fliers had been students of the squadron commander Tokarev. Seeing the commander in danger, they dashed to his aid and on the first attack both shot down one vulture. The remainder avoided air combat. The assault planes carried out their mission without losses. Guards Lt I. F. Galinskiy on 20 February 1945 died the death of a hero in carrying out a combat mission.

On 10 July, the fliers of the 59th Guards shap, Guards Lts V. N. Ivanov and B. G. Rossokhin in carrying out a mission in the region of the population point of Ozernitsa were fired on by heavy enemy antiaircraft fire. The aircraft of Lt Rossokhin, an expert pilot and experienced scout, was hit. He had to land on enemy territory. The Nazis dashed toward the descending aircraft. Then Lt Ivanov in making a dive, began to fire at point-blank range at the German soldiers who were endeavoring to reach the aircraft until the wounded Rossokhin could hide from the fascists. On 23 February 1945, both guardsmen were awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union for the excellent execution of missions.

When the troops had reached to the west of Pinsk in the middle of July, favorable conditions were created for an offensive by the troops of the left wing. The air support for the troops on the left wing of the front was entrusted to the 6th AA which had been reinforced by formations from the 16th AA and the RGK [High Command Reserve]. As a total on 17 July, there were 1,534 aircraft here. In this sector the enemy had up to 670 aircraft.

Control over the preparations for the operation and the coordinating of the actions of the air formations on the left wing of the front were carried out by the member of the military council of the front, the commander of the 16th AA, Gen S. I. Rudenko.

On 18 July, the troops on the left wing of the front went over to an offensive. The air formations, in making wave bombing and strafing attacks and in fighting against the enemy aviation, supported the offensive of the armies in breaking through the enemy defenses and crossing the Western Bug, they aided the rapid maneuvering of the 2d Guards Tank Army and the CMG in the Warsaw sector and supported the troops in crossing the Vistula and capturing a bridgehead. During the period from 18 through 31 July, the 6th AA made 7,591 sorties, and as a total for July, 11,856. In the 305 air

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battles, 282 fascist aircraft were shot down, and at the airfields the enemy lost 42 aircraft. In addition, the aviation destroyed a large number of enemy personnel and military equipment.<sup>1</sup>

In July 6, 646 overflights were noted by enemy aviation in the zone of the troops on the left wing.

At the start of the third 10 days of July, the troops on the right wing of the front, with air support, approached Brest, they captured the railroad junction of Czeremcha and in executing an outflanking maneuver, on 25 July reached the Western Bug in the section of Drohiczyn and Mielnik. The Brest Nazi grouping was threatened with encirclement. Their resistance was strengthened both on the ground and in the air. During the period from 22 through 26 July, fierce battles developed here. The enemy undertook rabid counterattacks with the participation of major tank groups.

For supporting the troops in repelling the enemy tanks, the army commander of the 16th AA on 23 July ordered the assault planes of the 2d Guards shad and the 4th shak under fighter cover from the 286th iad, to locate the main grouping of enemy tanks and infantry which were threatening counterattacks, and to destroy them. At 1930 hours, the scouts of the 2d Guards shad in the region of Kleszczele and Czeremcha detected a concentration of German tanks, infantry and motor vehicles. Some 24 Il-2 aircraft in six groups under the cover of 12 fighters took off to destroy them. Thirty minutes later the assault planes made a low-altitude attack on 42 tanks, several motor vehicles with antitank guns and tank trucks, as well as enemy infantry. As a result of the strike, the enemy suffered heavy losses. Subsequently the assault planes continued to destroy tanks in the same region.

The daytime bombers were also used in addition to the assault planes for destroying fascist tanks. On 21 July, to the west of Grodno in the area of the Second Belorussian Front, a concentration of tanks preparing for a counterattack was discovered. The attack on them was made by nine groups of seven-nine aircraft each by the 3d bak. The most effective were the actions by three groups of nine Pe-2 from the 96th Guards bap under the command of Hero of the Soviet Union Guards Maj A. P. Smirnov. Two groups bombed the target from level flight and one by diving. In the estimate of Chief Mar Avn A. A. Novikov, the bombers performed excellently. The enemy suffered great losses and its tank counterattack was thwarted.

In addition to countering enemy tanks, during the period of 22-26 July, the assault planes and fighters of the 16th AA, regardless of the difficult weather conditions, destroyed enemy artillery in positions and troops in the areas to the north of Brest and Janow Podlaski, to the south of Bielsk

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<sup>1</sup> Arkhiv MO SSSR, folio 336, inv. 5220, file 80, sheets 10, 52, 62 and 68.

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and Kleszczele, retreating troops along the roads of Wulka Dobryńska--Biala Podlaska, Leszczele--Suchowola, railroad trains at the stations of Biala Podlaska and an armored train at Siemiatycze station. The fighters, in addition, covered the battle formations of the troops and carried out air reconnaissance.

The Po-2 night bombers from the 271st nbad during this period during the night and day were transporting fuel and ammunition for the 4th Guards Cavalry Corps and the 65th Army. As a total they delivered 16.5 tons of fuel and a large quantity of various ammunition.

Having repelled the fierce enemy counterattacks and having bled the enemy in battles in the areas of Kleszczele, Ciernemcha and Vysokoye, our troops with air support on 27 July went over to a decisive offensive for the purpose of eliminating the Brest enemy grouping. Seeing the inevitability of encirclement, the enemy began a retreat to the west. The deputy squadron commander of the 78th Guards shap, Sr Lt V. F. Kolennikov, who flew out to reconnoiter on the roads to the west of Brest detected the movement of enemy motor columns with up to 2,000 motor vehicles. For excellently carried out reconnaissance, the commander of the AA commended Guardsman Kolennikov. On 23 February 1945, for exemplary fulfillment of missions and for the shown courage and valor, he was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. By that time he had made 130 combat sorties and destroyed 56 tanks, 67 guns and much other military equipment.

Having obtained the reconnaissance data, the army commander organized bombing and strafing attacks against the columns of the retreating Nazi troops. On this day the most effective operations were carried out by two groups of six assault planes from the 78th Guards shap headed by guardsman Capt L. I. Yuf and Lt G. A. Lazarev. Escorted by fighters they attacked up to 300 motor vehicles on the Mielnik-Mutnaya road. The enemy suffered great losses. Due to the destruction of crossings by the assault planes, its columns were stopped. On the night of 28 July, the 271st nbad bombed these crossings and the enemy troop concentrations in the areas of the crossings.

On 28 July our troops captured the city of Brest, an important defensive center of the Nazis in the Warsaw sector. The legendary Brest Fortress was also liberated. The order of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief pointed out that in these battles along with the troops the fliers of Col Gen Avn Rudenko, Maj Gens Avn Dzusov and Komarov, Cols Tatanashvili, Rybakov and Vinogradov had distinguished themselves. Commendation was given to the personnel of these air formations.

As a result of the brilliant victories of the Red Army by the end of July 1944, virtually the entire territory of Belorussia had been cleared of German occupiers. On 28 July, Headquarters gave the troops of the First Belorussian Front the mission of developing a further offensive in the general direction of Warsaw, reaching the Vistula and Narew and capturing bridgeheads on the banks of these rivers.

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The 16th AA, during the period of 28-31 July, in assisting the troops of the front, destroyed an enemy grouping to the west and northwest of Brest.

At dawn and during the day of 28 July, the 2d Guards and the 299th shad, following their reconnaissance data, in small groups and together with the fighters, began to attack the surrounded German grouping in the region of Bohukaly and Krziczew. First of all they attacked the head of an enormous column of motor vehicles, wagons, artillery and infantry endeavoring to break through in the direction of Janow Podlaski. The covered vans and armored personnel carriers burst into flames. The column stopped. Many vehicles began to drive off the road endeavoring to take shelter in the cover of the forest and on the outskirts of population points, and many trucks got stuck in ditches. A blockage was formed. Favorable conditions were created for air actions. Each group of assault planes independently selected its target and destroyed it with bombs and machine gun and cannon fire, making five-eight passes. The fighter escorts, having not encountered an air enemy, also strafed the enemy troops.

As a total on 28 July up to 600 vehicles, over 30 guns, up to 500 wagons, up to 900 horses and over 1,000 enemy soldiers were destroyed.

On 29-31 July, attacks were also made against enemy columns on the roads from Konstantynow to Losice, and these targets had been detected by the courageous scouts from the 59th Guards shap, Lts B. G. Rossokhin and V. A. Milyukov. About 400 vehicles and 200 wagons were left destroyed on the roads. Particularly successful were the operations against the enemy columns on 29 July carried out by two groups of six Il-2 under the command of Maj B. Ye. Greben'kov. In two passes, they destroyed 45 vehicles, 40 carts, 2 guns and up to 100 enemy soldiers.

The enemy grouping which had been surrounded to the west of Brest and attacked by bombing and strafing strikes had lost its battleworthiness and was easily destroyed by the ground forces. A special commission which examined the region of operations established that our air strikes had been very effective. Stretching before the members of the commission was an enormous cemetery of destroyed enemy military equipment.

The successful operations of the assault planes against the enemy grouping to the west of Brest can be seen also by the responses from the command of the ground forces. Thus, on 28 July, after an attack by a group of assault planes led by the commander of the 218th shap, Lt Col N. K. Lysenko, the staff of the 299th shad received the following telegram: "Your group of 11 Il-2 operating against the enemy concentrations in the region of Krziczew (12 km to the west of Brest), performed excellently. Please commend all the crews. Col Boykov." The commander of the 55th Guards Rifle Division Maj Gen A. P. Turchinskiy, who observed the actions of the assault planes affirmed the exceptionally high effectiveness of their bombing and strafing attacks, after which the units of the division captured the point of Konstantynow without particular enemy resistance.

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In some instances the mere appearance of the assault planes over the battlefield led to disorder among the enemy soldiers and officers. Thus, on 28 July, in the region of the village of Bohukaly, a group of our soldiers and officers was surrounded by superior Nazi forces. The appearance of five assault planes from the 59th Guards shap at this moment caused a panic among the German soldiers. The Nazis began to flee searching for shelter. The group of Soviet soldiers took this occasion and escaped from encirclement.

A resident of the village of Bohukaly, Viktor Mikoluk, related that on this day he with his family of nine persons had been arrested by the Germans and the family of partisan Mikoluk was to be executed. A detail of German soldiers had already brought them to the place of execution. At this very moment, two groups of assault planes appeared. The escorts fled in terror, abandoning the convicted persons on the road. The Mikoluk family without delay took cover and avoided execution.

On 30 July, assault planes from the 299th shad under a fighter cover from the 194th iad in the region of Siedlce were supporting units of a CMG. At the end of the day, the following telegram was received: "To Gen Krupskiy. The personnel of the CMG are inspired by the excellent combat work of your fliers in the region of Siedlce. The soldiers and officers are profoundly grateful for supporting them in combat. Commander of the CMG, Guards Lt Gen Kryukov."

The assault planes on 31 July also operated successfully against the enemy river crossings. At midday six Ilyushins from the 79th Guards shap headed by Maj S. T. Borshchev escorted by four Yak-1, made a low-altitude attack on the crossing over the Western Bug at Tonkele and the transport which had accumulated here. The crossing was blown into the air from direct bomb hits. The path of retreat for the enemy troops was cut. Subsequently the deputy commander of the 79th Guards shap, Lt Col S. T. Borshchev, was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. He had successfully carried out 119 combat sorties, in so doing causing heavy losses to the enemy.

On 31 July, Moscow saluted the troops of the front which had liberated the cities of Siedlce and Minsk-Mazowiecki, and in the battles for these the fliers of Gens Krupskiy, Tokarev, Sidnev, Lt Col Gavril'chenko and Maj Ukhanev distinguished themselves.

The Soviet government had high regard for the combat feats and military service of the men of the AA. A number of air formations and units received governmental decorations for successful combat in the operations for the liberation of Belorussia. The 3d bak (commander, Gen A. Z. Karavatskiy) received the Order of Suvorov, Second Degree, and was given the honorary name of Bobruysk; the 8th iak (commander, Gen A. S. Osipenko) received the Order of the Red Banner and the name Bobruysk; the 2d Guards and 299th shad (commanders, Gens G. O. Komarov and I. V. Krupskiy) received the Order of Suvorov, Second Degree, and the 16th odrap (commander, Lt Col D. S. Sherstyuk) received the Order of the Red Banner.

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Honorary names were also given as follows: Zhlobin to the 196th shad (commander, Lt Col K. K. Grishchenko); Minsk to the 233d and 352d iap (commanders, Lt Cols V. V. Kravtsov and P. I. Khara); Slutsk to the 218th, 431st and 874th shap (commanders, Lt Cols N. K. Lysenko, P. G. Plokhov and M. G. Volkov); Baranovichi to the 6th iak, the 323d iad, the 59th Guards shap, the 30th 67th Guards iap and the 133d iap (commanders, Gen I. M. Dzusov, Col P. P. Rybakov, Lt Cols M. G. Sklyarov, Kh. M. Ibatulin, A. B. Panov and K. A. Tovstashiy); Slonim to the 199th shad (commander, Col N. S. Vinogradov), while the 946th shap, the 484th and 157th iap (commanders, Maj V. S. Slyunkin, Lt Cols P. D. Yegorov and V. F. Volkov) received the name Brest.

Many aviators from the formations and units were commended by governmental decorations. During the period from 24 June through 1 August, decorations were received by 591 fliers, 115 navigators, 189 gunners, 184 engineers and technicians, 148 motor transport drivers, 70 staff officers, 44 political workers and 262 soldiers of different specialties. A total of 1,603 persons.<sup>1</sup>

The decorations were presented to the aviators in a ceremony, in front of the full unit and with the colors of the units unfurled. Then meetings were held with great enthusiasm.

Having completed the defeat of the Brest grouping, the troops on the right wing of the First Belorussian Front commenced the battles on the approaches to Warsaw, while the troops of the left wing reached the Vistula. Thus, they had completely shifted their operations to Polish territory and along with the troops of the adjacent fronts had begun the liberation of the fraternal Polish people from the Nazi occupiers.

In line with this the political bodies of the 16th AA carried out extensive work to explain to the personnel of the air units the historic liberation mission of the USSR and its Armed Forces, and they explained the standards of conduct for the Soviet liberator soldiers abroad. In the units party meetings were held with the agenda: "On the Tasks of the Party Organizations in Line with the Crossing of the Polish State Frontier by the Red Army." The victories of the Soviet troops caused a feeling of pride among our aviators, they strengthened their confidence in the might of Soviet weapons and inspired them to new heroic feats.

The Belorussian offensive operation coincided in time with the opening of the second in Western Europe. However, regardless of the landing of the Anglo-American troops in Normandy, a larger portion of the most battleworthy ground forces and aviation of Nazi Germany and its satellites continued to

<sup>1</sup> Arkhiv MO SSSR, folio 368, inv. 6512, file 84, sheet 379.



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fight on the Soviet-German Front where the outcome of World War II was determined. On 1 July 1944, on the Eastern Front the German command was keeping 2,796 combat aircraft, and just about 500 in Western Europe.<sup>1</sup> The Nazis had an opportunity to strongly defend each line, and to further strengthen the resistance to our aviation. In July, the activities of fascist aviation almost doubled (from 1,363 aircraft overflights in June up to 2,580 in July).

The Belorussian operation was characterized by a rapid advance of the Soviet troops, and this required the prompt rebasing of the air units. The command made a great effort to support the aviation at the new airfields. In this situation, the servicing of the flight units was basically carried out by the personnel of the forward commandant's offices which moved ahead of the troops.

In the course of the offensive from Zhlobin to Warsaw, the air units of the 16th AA had to be repeatedly rebased and under very difficult conditions. Thus, in July the fighters were rebased seven-eight times, the assault planes five-six, the night bombers eight, and the daytime bombers three-four times. The rear units were shifted accordingly. For maintaining continuous operations by our aviation, the rebasing was usually carried out by one-half of the air formation (unit). The other at the same time continued operations from the previous airfields.

During June the forces of the AA built 77 new airfields, of which over 60 percent began to be built 3-5 km behind the front line. On 1 August, the airfield network of the AA numbered 251 airfields, but a majority of them was not used due to the great distance from the front line. At this time there were only 24 operating airfields as well as airfields prepared for aviation basing with full rear services (25-100 km behind the front line).

During July, the AA carried out 6,638 combat sorties for supporting the advancing troops on the right wing of the front. In 140 air battles, the enemy lost 115 planes and 11 at airfields. The battle losses of the AA occurred predominantly from enemy antiaircraft fire.

In the Belorussian offensive operation, the air formations and units of the 16th AA employed various methods of combat and practical procedures. These were determined by the desire of the command to continuously operate against the enemy from the air on the main sectors of the offensive by the front's troops. They were also determined by the nature of the enemy defenses, saturated with a large number of weapons and requiring a high hit density in a short period of time; by the air situation characterized by the insignificant activities of enemy aviation but by the very strong resistance by the enemy antiaircraft weapons and frequently the very complex meteorological conditions.

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<sup>1</sup> See "Istoriya Velikoy Otechestvennoy Voiny Sovetskogo Soyuz 1941-1945," Vol 4, Moscow, Voenizdat, 1964, pp 125-126, 524.

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As a consequence of the rapid advance of the troops and the necessity of rebasing the air formations behind them, control of the aviation encountered certain difficulties. The command posts of the AA and the air formations had to be continuously moved, while maintaining uninterrupted communications with the air units. As an average the command post of the AA remained at one place for 5-6 days. This limited the opportunities of using wire communications and led to an increase in radio traffic. However, in the course of the offensive there was not a single instance of a delay in the transmitting of any battle orders or dispositions. With a brief absence of technical communications, the orders, dispositions and reports were delivered by liaison aircraft or motor transport, and control of the air formations and units was not interrupted.

For the personnel of the 16th AA, the Belorussian Operation was a good practical school, where they sharpened up and improved the methods of organizing and conducting air operations for the purpose of achieving victory over a strong and perfidious enemy. By the end of the operation, all the personnel of the AA had acquired rich combat experience.

## In the Battles for Bridgeheads and Help for the Warsaw Rebels

At the beginning of August 1944, the fighting strength of the 16th AA was again changed. The 6th iak, the 2d Guards shad, the 271st nbad, the 286th iad, the 16th odrap and the 98th okrap continued to be part of the army. The 3d bak, the 299th shad, the 282d iad and the 19th iap returned from the 6th AA. The 4th shak and 8th iak became part of the 4th AA.

The 6th shak and the 13th iak now became part of the 16th AA. The 6th shak, under the command of Maj Gen Avn B. K. Tokarev, consisted of the 197th shad (the 618th, 756th and 805th shap; it was commanded by the communist since 1941, the active participant in the Civil War, Col V. A. Timofeyev) and the 198th shad (the 41st, 567th and 945th shap) under the command of Hero of the Soviet Union, Col V. I. Belousov. The 13th iak headed by Maj Gen G. A. Sidnev had the 193d iad (the 347th, 515th and 518th iap) under the command of Hero of the Soviet Union Col S. I. Mironov (subsequently Col Gen Avn and Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Air Force) and the 194th iad (56th, 530th and 848th iap) under the command of Col F. N. Dement'yev. The 299th shad was headed by Lt Col V. P. Khramchenko (from September, Hero of the Soviet Union Lt Col A. G. Nakonechnikov). All the personnel of these formations possessed good training and great combat experience.

In August the 16th AA had up to 1,250 aircraft. About 550 aircraft remained in the 6th AA (on 5 September, the AA was transferred to the reserves of the HqSHC).

By 29 July, the troops of the 69th Army which had advanced on the left wing of the front had captured a bridgehead on the Vistula in the region of Pulawy. In the region of Magnuszew the crossing of the Vistula started on 1 August by the forces of the 8th Guards Army. The 6th shak, 6th and 13th iak and the 271st nbad were assigned for supporting this.

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At dawn the fighters were patrolling over the troops in the jump-off position, during the period of the crossing and during the battle on the western bank of the river. The assault planes by bombing and strafing strikes aided the troops in the landing and broadening of the bridgehead. After the capturing of the first line of trenches, with the shifting of the artillery fire deep into the enemy defenses, the assault planes of the 198th shad under a fighter cover began actions against the artillery in the positions and the strongpoints which were impeding the advance of our troops. The 6th shak which in operational terms was under the command of the 8th Guards Army and 13th iak during the day made 122 sorties.

On the first day, the troops captured a bridgehead up to 15 km wide and 10 km deep, and by 4 August had thrown two bridges across the Vistula.

During the following days, fierce battles raged on the ground and in the air for holding and extending the bridgehead. Enemy aviation from 5 through 14 August sharply increased its activities. Many times it endeavored to bomb the troops on the bridgehead and the crossings over the Vistula. The number of overflights by enemy aircraft during individual days reached 400-600, and each day up to 30 dogfights occurred.

The main task during these days for the 16th AA was to prevent the enemy aviation from reaching our bridgeheads and crossings. Simultaneously it had to assist the troops in extending the bridgeheads, repel enemy counter-attacks and also conduct reconnaissance. The carrying out of these missions was complicated by temporary difficulties in the basing of our air units and in the supplying of fuel for them. For a certain time their combat capabilities were below the capabilities of enemy aviation which daily made 2-3-fold more sorties than the 16th AA and put up strong resistance to our aviation.

During this period in the region of the Magnuszew bridgehead, our pilots frequently initiated air battles with strong groups of enemy aircraft and regardless of their numerical superiority, sustained victories showing decisiveness and courage in this. Thus, on 9 August, 12 Yak-9 from the 347th iap headed by squadron commander Capt L. I. Ryzhiy, were covering the troops and crossings over the Vistula. Some 22 enemy FW-190 aircraft flying in four groups appeared on the approaches to the Magnuszew bridgehead at an altitude of 3,500 meters. Our Yaks were guided to them by the ground radios. Capt Ryzhiy ordered Sr Lt I. Ye. Belov with two elements to cover the attack, and himself at the head of eight fighters attacked the first group of fascist aircraft and immediately in attacking from the front and from below shot down one Fokker-Wulf from a short range. Then, having gained altitude by a combat turn, Ryzhiy with his wingman attacked another enemy group from above and behind and destroyed another two FW-190. By their decisive actions our fighters disrupted the enemy battle formation, they forced it to drop the bombs chaotically over enemy territory and turn back. During the war Capt L. K. Ryzhiy made 250 combat sorties and in 89 air battles shot down 17 fascist aircraft. On 15 May 1946 he was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. Presently L. I. Ryzhiy is a colonel and a senior instructor at the Military Academy of the Armored and Tank Troops.

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On that day a group consisting of 12 Yak-9 fighters under the command of Capt A. I. Silukov engaged 30 Fokker-Wulfs in a fierce air engagement on the approaches to the bridgehead. In this battle in addition to Silukov, Lt I. A. Dvurechenskiy and Sr Lt V. M. Oganegov showed brilliant skills. They shot down three enemy fighters and prevented the enemy aviation from strafing our troops. Capt A. I. Silukov in September 1944 was awarded the Order of Alexander Nevskiy. The deputy squadron commander Sr Lt V. M. Oganegov during the war years successfully made 290 combat sorties and in 67 air battles won 16 victories. On 15 May 1946 he was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

A remarkable feat was carried out on 10 August by fliers from the 431st shap under the command of Hero of the Soviet Union Capt D. I. Smirnov and Sr Lt B. N. Moshkov. In destroying enemy artillery in the region of Glowaczow, the assault plane pilots noticed that 25 German Ju-87 bombers under the cover of 10 FW-190 fighters were turning for an attack over our battle formations. Having correctly assessed the situation, Moshkov radioed: "Attack the enemy bombers!" Lt M. I. Pen'kov was the first to drop away from the group, and boldly attacked the leading element of the Ju-87. Then the entire group of our assault planes dove into the formation of Junkers. Confusion arose among the fascist pirates and this was immediately used by our fliers. Moshkov and Pen'kov both shot down one Junkers (subsequently both pilots were awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union). The group of 10 fighters from the 530th iap which was covering the assault planes destroyed 8 enemy aircraft, losing just one La-5. The assault planes had no losses. The attempt of the fascists to attack our troops was thwarted.

On 12 August, four fighters from the 30th Guards iap of the 273d iad led by Sr Lt I. D. Mamonov arrived to cover the crossings over the Vistula at the Magnuszew bridgehead. Not more than several minutes had passed when 30 Ju-87 bombers and 30 FW-190 fighters approached the crossing with the sun behind them. The Nazi fliers probably did not expect an attack by four Soviet fighters. But Guardsman Mamonov immediately ordered his wingmen to close with the enemy. They immediately dove into the formation of enemy bombers and having split it, began to settle the score with the fascist vultures one by one. The rapid attacks by our fighters forced the Junkers to get rid of their bombs far from the crossing. The battle was not easy. Each of our pilots was fighting against several fascists, but the exceptional daring, courage and high skills led to victory. In the course of the air battle, flier I. D. Mamonov shot down two fighters, Sr Lt P. V. Balmykin destroyed a Junkers and a Fokker-Wulf, and Jr Lt S. V. Davydov started his combat score. He set two fascist aircraft, a Ju-87 and a FW-190, on fire and he hit one FW-190. Jr Lt V. P. Vashchilkin shot down one enemy fighter. In acting skillfully and decisively our courageous fliers carried out their mission excellently.

Two groups of four fighters from the 352d iap led by the communists, squadron commander Sr Lt B. G. Deyev and the Komsomol organizer, flight commander Lt V. G. Karmin just as courageously engaged 27 Ju-87 bombers covered by

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16 FW-190 fighters in combat. As a result of the skillful combination of fire and maneuvering, Deyev and Karmin both shot down two Fokker-Wulfs. The young flier Jr Lt A. G. Klochkov also fought bravely and he shot down two aircraft (on 18 February 1945, he did not return from a mission). The reinforcements which arrived quickly consisting of pilots L. I. Kichkov, G. K. Yelisseyev, A. I. Mitusov, A. I. Ptitsyn, P. S. Gurzhiya, A. P. Kamelin, P. D. Volchenko and others completed the rout of the enemy. In this combat, the fliers of the 352d iap (commander, Lt Col P. I. Khara) shot down 13 fascist aircraft without losses and the others were not allowed to reach the target.

There were also unsuccessful air battles. Thus, on 12 August, four Yak-9 from the 515th iap led by Lt S. P. Pusev at an altitude of 2,200 meters were covering the troops in the area of the Magnuszew bridgehead. Having discovered two FW-190 at the same altitude, Pusev began to climb. His wingmen remained behind. Regardless of this he decided to engage in a turning battle alone. But when he closed in on the tail of one Fokker-Wulf, another attacked him. In breaking off battle, Pusev began to search for his group which had remained below. Lt V. G. Popov who was the deputy leader also left the group and became involved in pursuing a Fokker-Wulf. As a result of the absence of control and reciprocal support, the group lost one pilot and the flight commander Lt S. P. Pusev did not become a victim of the enemy merely by good luck.

In the battles over the Vistula, shortcomings also appeared in fighter control over the battlefield. The reinforcements were at times late in battle, and in certain instances individual enemy groups penetrated the positions of our troops. Upon instructions from the commander of the 13th AA, 3-5 km from the forward edge, fighter ambushes were organized and several control posts were set up directly along the front line, and here there were commanders of the air formations with radios and radars. These measures provided the needed results.

The air situation changed significantly in our favor from 14 August, when the rebasing of the aviation was completed and its fuel supply organized. The air formations increased their actions, the enemy began to suffer heavy losses and the needed help for the troops of the front rose.

On this day the fliers of the 6th shak, the 2d Guards and 299th shad escorted by fighters from the 6th and 13th iak and the 286th iad by continuous attacks by 19 groups destroyed the enemy in the region of Warka, assisting the troops of the 8th Guards Army in broadening the bridgehead. Simultaneously, six groups of assault planes supported the offensive of the 70th Army. Having made 821 sorties, the fliers destroyed much enemy equipment and soldiers. In 10 air battles, 8 enemy aircraft were shot down.

Excellent actions were also carried out by groups of fighters and assault planes under the command of Hero of the Soviet Union Maj P. F. Shevelev, Capt V. M. Beyzak, Sr Lts L. G. Koptev, F. A. Dronov and V. M. Podkopayev.

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In the difficult battles for the Vistula, the frontline friendship grew stronger between the assault planes and the ground troops. At the peak of the battles on 14 August a group of assault planes from the 299th shad, in flying over the forward edge, dropped a pennant in the positions of the 271st Guards Rifle Regiment on which were two keys and a letter. The pilots had written: "These keys are from Warsaw and the fascist lair of Berlin. We hope that you will be able to open the gates of these cities, and we, your 'humpback' friends, will support you from the air." In the subunits of the rifle regiment, the challenge of the assault planes was received with great enthusiasm, and in their letter of reply to the pilots, the soldiers, sergeants and officers assured them that the order of the assault planes would be carried out.

The approach of the Red Army to the frontiers of Nazi Germany led to a strengthening of the offensive elan among the personnel of the AA. Bravery and skill were shown by the fliers of the 6th and 13th iak who covered the crossings and troops on the Magnuszew bridgehead. From 10 through 14 August, the fighters of the 6th iak shot down 42 aircraft of the Nazi Luftwaffe. They themselves lost four aircraft. The fliers of the 13th iak in August carried out 85 dogfights and destroyed 77 enemy aircraft. At the same time, among the fighter pilots there was the particularly popular slogan "Enemy aircraft spotted--shot down!"

Among the fighters which stood out in terms of the results of combat in August were the 347th iap (commander Lt Col P. B. Dankevich), the pilots of which made 13 air battles and shot down 15 FW-190 aircraft without having any losses. The fliers of the 30th and 67th Guards iap (commanders Lt Cols Kh. M. Ibatulin and A. B. Panov) fought excellently against the air enemy, as well as the fliers of the 19th iap (commander Lt Col P. F. Chupikov). In carrying out "free hunting" Majors Hero of the Soviet Union A. Ya. Baklan and D. S. Titorenko, Sr. Lt M. F. Tarakanov and A. A. Karayev, Capts O. S. Belikov and M. N. Tyul'kin, and Lt V. A. Gromakovskiy distinguished themselves. Subsequently Karayev, Bekikov, Tyul'kin and Gromakovskiy were awarded the titles of Hero of the Soviet Union. The flight commander of the 176th Guards iap V. A. Gromakovskiy during the war years made 186 combat sorties and in 29 air battles shot down 16 enemy aircraft. The deputy squadron commander of this same regiment A. A. Karayev by February 1945 had to his battle score 373 combat sorties, 75 air battles and 18 air victories.

The army veterans will remember the feat of the air scout Lt V. S. Semenov (721st iap). On 17 August, after carrying out his combat mission, over the front line he encountered an enemy Ju-88 reconnaissance plane and immediately attacked it. He had run out of ammunition, but the enemy aircraft was continuing to travel west. Then Semenov decided to catch up and knock it down with a ram. Approaching the enemy from the rear, he hit the left wing of his La-7 on the tail of the Junkers which immediately went into an uncontrolled dive. The Lavochkin also went out of control and the flier was forced to bail out.

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Semenov landed on enemy occupied territory. On the second day he succeeded in meeting up with our scouts, and a month later he crossed the front line and arrived back in his unit. For the feat carried out V. G. Semenov was presented a governmental decoration. During the war years, V. G. Semenov, one of the best air scouts in the army, made 228 combat sorties and destroyed 10 enemy aircraft.

Along with the successes in the difficult August battles over the Magnuszew bridgehead, our fliers also suffered losses. Thus, on 20 August, in carrying out a mission in the region of Warka, the enemy antiaircraft fire shot down the Il-2 piloted by the courageous woman pilot, the navigator of the 805th shap, Sr Lt A. A. Yegorova. Wounded and burned, she was taken prisoner in an unconscious state and remained at the camp in Kustrin until she was liberated by our troops in January 1945. Prior to military service, A. A. Yegorova had worked as a machinist in the construction of the Moscow subway, and from 1938, after completing the Kalinin Air Club, she was an instructor pilot. In August 1941, she became a military pilot. Two years later she joined the Communist Party. For military feats A. A. Yegorova was awarded two Orders of the Red Banner, the Order of the Patriotic War and several medals. In May 1965, for exemplary fulfillment of the missions of the command during the years of the Great Patriotic War and for the shown valor and heroism, A. A. Timofeyeva (Yegorova) was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

By mid-August, the troops of the 8th Guards Army, in repelling numerous counterattacks and overcoming fierce enemy resistance, with the aid of aviation not only kept but also broadened the Mognuszew bridgehead up to 20-25 km along the front and up to 15 km in depth. In the course of the battles on the bridgehead, the air formations of the AA in August for supporting the troops made around 800 sorties by the assault planes and 1,200 by the fighters. The air regiments of the 6th shak under the cover of fighters from the 194th iad operated particularly effectively.

The air operations were highly praised by the command of the 8th Guards Army. On 20 August the following telegram was received from it: "The military council expresses its thanks to all the flight personnel of the air corps which cooperated on 19 and 20 August with the army units to extend the bridgehead on the western bank of the Vistula River and capture Glowaczow, it sends congratulation on Aviation Day and is hopeful that the courageous assault planes in the future will mercilessly crush the damned enemy of our motherland, German fascism. Commander of the 8th Guards Army Col Gen Chuykov, member of the military council Lt Gen Art Pozharskiy, chief of staff Col Belyavskiy."

This praise was not accidental, for the command and the staff of the 6th shak (chief of staff, Col Ya. A. Fakov and his deputy Lt Col P. Ye. Marmaz) as well as the commander of the 198th shad Hero of the Soviet Union Col V. I. Belousov and the chief of staff Col A. F. Kopytin excelled particularly in

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the clarity of organizing the cooperation between aviation and the troops. For successful operations the 198th shad also received thanks from the commanders of the 28th and 29th Guards Rifle corps. Particularly distinguishing themselves were pilots V. N. Reshetnyak (567th shap), F. U. Shchelkunov (618th shap), A. S. Leusenko and M. M. Yeliseyev (756th shap).

At this time in the Warsaw sector the operations of our aviation came down to supporting the troops of the 28th and 70th armies in repelling numerous enemy counterattacks in the areas to the east and southeast of the Warsaw suburb of Praga. For outstanding operations on the battlefield on 18-20 August, the commander of the 70th Army thanked the personnel of the 299th shad, the 241st bad, the 282d and 286th iad (commanders, Lt Col V. P. Khramchenko, Cols A. G. Fedorov, Yu. M. Berkal' and Lt Col I. G. Trilevich).

From the second half of August 1944, the campaign record of the 1st Air Division of the Polish Army (commander Col I. A. Smaga, from November 1944, Maj Gen Avn) began in combat association with Soviet aviators as part of the 16th AA. The division had been organized from Polish patriots with fraternal aid from the USSR, and served as the core for the development of the Polish Air Force. It included the first iap Warszawa with Yak-1 aircraft, the 2nd nbap Krakow with Po-2, and the 611th (in November, renamed the 3d) shap with Il-2. As a total the division had over 100 aircraft.

The Polish air regiments made their first combat sorties on 23 August together with the experienced Soviet pilots from the 233d iap from the Zelechow airfield. The combat of the air division was carried out in the interests of supporting the 1st Polish Army. In September-October, the 1st (on 3 November it was renamed the 4th) Polish Mixed Air Division made up to 2,000 combat sorties. The fraternal friendship between Soviet and Polish aviators was forged in the fire of the joint struggle against the Nazi invaders.

By the beginning of August, the troops on the right wing of the front (48th 65th and 28th armies) had significantly fallen behind (by approximately 100 km) from the troops of the center and left wing which had reached the Vistula. The rapid evening out of the front line and the capturing of a bridgehead on the Narew River (in the Pultusk sector) became the main mission of these armies. The 16th AA received the mission of supporting the troops in the offensive and in capturing the bridgehead. For this the 2d Guards and 299th shad, the 282d and 286th iad and the 271st nbad were assigned.

In supporting the advancing troops, the air formations of the AA destroyed enemy personnel and equipment in areas of concentration and on roads, and artillery in positions. The assault planes attacked predominantly in small groups upon requests from the combined-arms command. In addition to direct escorting of the assault planes, the fighters covered the battle formations of the troops. For supporting and covering the advancing troops on the right wing of the front, in August the assault planes made over 2,000 sorties and the fighters up to 3,500.



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The enemy aviation in this sector showed great activity and in every possible way impeded the operations of our fliers. Thus, on 25 August, a group of 17 Il-2 from the 658th shap of the 299th shad headed by Lt Col E. V. Viyk was attacking enemy artillery mortar batteries in the region of Wyszkow. On the second pass the enemy antiaircraft artillery stopped firing as 12 fascist fighters had appeared and they began to attack the assault planes when they pulled out of their dive. On the fourth pass two Il-2 broke away from the group and at this moment were attacked by an element of Fokker-Wulfs. From their fire the airplane of Capt I. P. Smyshlyak caught fire and fell. The second Il-2 of Jr Lt P. V. Vichkanov was hit, but he did reach his own territory. Our covering fighters shot down three enemy aircraft in this battle.

Regardless of the complex situation the assault planes operated boldly and with good results. During these days groups from the 299th shad led by Lt Cols N. K. Lysenko and M. G. Volkov, Majs N. P. Matveyev and K. Ye. Strashnyy, Cpts M. I. Kuchinskiy, N. S. Latskov and N. V. Oparin, Sr Lts V. G. Balamutkin and B. N. Moshkov, Lt Ye. N. Selyanin and many others distinguished themselves. The fliers of the 218th, 431st and 874th shap always distinguished themselves by high combat skills.

The results of the operations of the air formations of the AA were stated in the responses from the command of the ground forces.

"During the period from 18 through 21 August, the 299th shad, regardless of the difficult weather conditions, supported the advance of the 3d Guards Rifle Corps of the 28th Army. During this period the assault planes made more than 300 sorties, in disrupting enemy defenses and demoralizing its personnel. In the region of Mieczislawow the assault planes impeded an enemy counterattack and helped the units of the corps throw it back beyond the Western Bug. The fliers from the 218th shap of Lt Col N. K. Lysenko prevented the building of a temporary crossing. For the outstanding work of the assault planes, I would like to state our gratitude to all the personnel of the 299th shad. Commander of the 3d Guards Rifle Corps Maj Gen Perkhovich."<sup>1</sup>

"The 2d Guards shad during the period from 11 through 29 August made 1,016 sorties for the 70th Army. As a result of the bombing and strafing attacks against the enemy, it suffered great losses in tanks, artillery, transport and personnel. A number of instances were established when as a consequence of the action of the assault planes, the enemy infantry was demoralized, it took to flight abandoning weapons and equipment. The successful operations of the assault planes to a significant degree aided the 70th Army in carrying out the given missions. Commander of the 70th Army Col Gen Popov, member of the military council Maj Gen Savkov, chief of staff Maj Gen Lyanin."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Arkhiv MO SSSR, folio 368, inv. 6476, file 268, sheet 317.

<sup>2</sup> Arkhiv MO SSSR, folio 368, inv. 6476, file 359, sheets 245-249.

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During the last 10 days of August and in September, extensive work was carried out by the fliers of the 62d Guards Air Regiment of the GVF. Each day in making 40-65 sorties, they transported wounded soldiers from the front to the rear, to Siedlce, Brest and Pinsk.

In the course of the operations, as before great attention was given to air reconnaissance. In that difficult situation where the air formations were experiencing an acute lack of fuel, the AA commander issued special warrants to the commanders of the reconnaissance subunits, and according to these warrants at all airfields the reconnaissance aircraft were supplied with fuel first.

In August the 16th AA made 10,667 combat sorties. In 249 air battles, 250 enemy aircraft were shot down.

As a consequence of the increased resistance from enemy aviation and anti-aircraft weapons, the AA suffered significant losses in bombers, fighters and assault planes.

During the month, 5,119 aircraft overflights were noted for the enemy aviation. Actually the enemy aviation made significantly more sorties as many aircraft did not approach the front line and were not counted by our air defense system.

The Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet and the Supreme Commander-in-Chief highly regarded the combat contribution of the aviators of the 16th AA. For the shown valor in battles against the Nazi invaders and for mass heroism of the personnel, on 19 August 1944, the following changes were effected: The 299th shad became the 11th Guards shad (commander Gen I. V. Krupskiy); the 218th, 431st and 874th shap of this division became the 173d, 174th and 175th Guards shap (commanders Lt Cols N. K. Lysenko, P. G. Plokhov and Maj M. G. Volkov); the 271st nbad (the 23d, 44th and 45th Guards nbap) became the 9th Guards nbad (commander Col K. I. Rasskazov).

The air formations and units which had distinguished themselves in preceding battles were given honorary names: Lublin to the 6th shak, the 6th sak, the 242d nbad and the 919th Air Liaison Regiment (commanders Gen B. K. Tokarev, Cols M. Kh. Borisenko, P. A. Kalinin, and Lt Col A. Ye. Ishutin); Siedlce to the 13th iak, the 658th shap and the 163d iap (commanders Gen B. A. Sidnev, Lt Col E. V. Viyk and Maj V. M. Ukhanev); Deblin to the 197th shad and 193d iad (commanders Cols V. A. Timofeyev and S. I. Mironov). Simultaneously the Order of the Red Banner was awarded to the 6th sak, the 242d nbad, the 197th, 199th and 3d Guards shad, the 1st Guards, 323d and 336th iad, the 8th Guards bap, the 71st Guards, the 218th, 431st and 874th shap, the 127th, 149th, 157th, 163d, 248th and 347th iap, the 93d okrap and the 919 oaps (commanders Cols M. Kh. Borisenko, P. A. Kalinin, V. A. Timofeyev, N. S. Vinogradov, A. A. Smirnov, V. V. Sukhoryabov, P. P. Rybakov and S. P. Grashchenkov, Lt Cols G. I. Popov, A. I. Sevast'yanov, N. K. Lysenko, P. G. Plokhov, M. G. Volkov, V. V. Puzeykin, N. T. Nikitin, V. F. Volkov, Maj V. M. Ukhanev, Lt Cols V. S. Mukhin, P. B. Dankevich, K. M. Myasoyedov and A. Ye. Ishutin).

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Many officers and generals were awarded Orders of the Soviet Union and were promoted in rank.

The ranks of the aviators in the AA gained a new group of holders of the Gold Star. By Ukases of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet of 2 and 19 August 1944, for exemplary fulfillment of the missions of the command and for heroism and courage shown in this, the title of Hero of the Soviet Union was awarded to Col Gen Avn S. I. Rudenko, Maj Ye. A. Azarov, Capt O. S. Belikov and K. F. Zakharov (posthumously), to Sr Lts F. B. Bublikov and B. N. Moshkov, Lt B. A. Lakhtin and Col P. F. Chupikov.

For Pavel Fedorovich Chupikov, August 1944 was particularly memorable. He received the rank of colonel and became a Hero of the Soviet Union, and the 19th iap which he commanded became the 176th Guards Regiment and was awarded the Order of Alexander Nevskiy.

In 1931, as an 18-year-old youth, Chupikov volunteered for the Red Army. A year later he was already studying in a military-technical school, and after completing it he moved from a squadron technicians to an engineer. In 1938 he participated in the battles at Lake Khasan and was awarded the Order of the Red Star. In 1940, he achieved his dreams of becoming a pilot. After completing the Kacha Pilot School he received his wings. With the start of the war and until the day of victory, communist Chupikov was on the front. In March 1944 he was appointed the commander of the famous 19th iap which was manned by first-rate ace pilots. During the war years the fliers of the regiment made around 9,000 combat sorties, they carried out 750 air battles and destroyed 445 enemy aircraft. P. F. Chupikov made around 400 sorties and in 77 air battles personally shot down 14 enemy aircraft and 6 in a group. In the air regiment were more than 10 Heroes of the Soviet Union. The fliers of the 19th iap carried out many glorious deeds and for this the regiment became a Guards Unit and received the honorary name of Proskurov and was awarded three battle orders.

After the war P. F. Chupikov commanded air formations. Then he completed the Military Academy of the General Staff, he commanded the aviation of a district, and was in charge of Air Force combat training. For combat feats and unflinching service he was awarded the Gold Star, three Orders of Lenin, five Orders of the Red Banner, and many medals. At present Col Gen Avn Pavl Fedorovich Chupikov continues to serve on the Main Inspectorate of the USSR Ministry of Defense.

Like the fliers, the soldiers of many of the rear units also distinguished themselves in unstinting labor. They continuously supported the air operations for the sake of victory over the hated enemy. In the course of the Belorussian and subsequent operations, the following units distinguished themselves and were decorated: The 80th RAB (chief Col M. P. Shcherbatyuk) received the Order of the Red Banner; the 21st, 28th 5th and 56th RAB (chiefs Cols M. I. Kuzin and M. A. Vasil'yev and Lt Cols V. M. Smirnov and A. V. Ginzburg) received the Order of the Red Star. The 265th and 464th (commanders Maj N. A.

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Blinov and A. I. Belousov) received the Order of the Red Banner, while the 681st, 552d, 403d, 524th, 669th, 671st, 702d, 766th, 930th and 895th (commanders Lt Cols F. P. Bagrov and Ye. A. Ponamarchuk, Majs D. A. Yerшов, S. L. Lenskiy, G. M. Kravtsov, G. A. Yermakov, Ye. V. Ovcharenko, B. I. Danil'chenko, and L. L. Mandriko, and Capt V. B. Kuznetsov) received the Order of the Red Star. Many servicemen from the rear units were commended by governmental decorations.

During the period of the intense combat from July through August 1944, particularly difficult for the AA rear services was the supplying of ammunition and fuel for the air formations. Due to the lengthening supply lines and the shortage of motor transport, aviation during individual periods had available very meager supplies of fuel at the airfields. At times this restricted their operations. Supplies were delivered to the forward airfields at this time by motor transport and partially by Li-2 aircraft (a distance of 400-500 km from the supply depots).

The AA rear units during this time carried out very extensive work. Particular mention must be made of the unstinting labor by the motor vehicle drivers. For example, in the 403d bao the gas truck driver Komsomol member Yugin in a day traveled 650 km, delivering fuel for aircraft. Having returned to his unit, he refused rest and immediately set out on a second trip. The military truck drivers of the 403d, 429th and 702d bao, Kirichenko, Loychenko, Boychenko, Karazin, Lazarev, I. M. Davgan', G. P. Lebedenko, P. F. Nesterenko, Shelestov, A. Ya. Vityukov and many others, were awarded the emblem "Outstanding Driver" for excellent work. In each unit of the 16th AA there were many similar examples of labor valor.

Due to the fact that the troops of the First Belorussian Front during 2-month continuous battles had advanced 500-600 km, their rear support had become even more difficult. With the reaching of the Vistula, the offensive operations of the armies in essence had been exhausted. Under these conditions, on 29 August the troops of the First Belorussian Front were ordered by Headquarters to go over to the defensive along the entire front. However, for the purposes of improving their position, the armies of the front with support of aviation in September-October in certain areas still were carrying out partial offensive operations.

In the Pultusk sector, such an operation beginning in September was carried out by troops from the 65th and 48th armies; they were to cross the Narew River and capture bridgeheads on its western bank. For supporting these armies, the commander of the 16th AA assigned the 2d and 11th Guards shad and a portion of forces from the 6th shak, and for covering the ground troops and assault planes, the 6th iak and the 282d and 286th iad. A number of air formations was shifted to the reserves.

The troop offensive started on 3 September with air support. During the entire day the assault planes destroyed artillery in position, personnel in trenches, as well as the enemy columns which had commenced a retreat.

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During the day a group of 14 Il-2 from the 618th shap under the command of Sr Lt V. I. Yeskin, in being covered by eight La-5, attacked enemy artillery 20 km to the southwest of the point of Ostrow Mazowiecka. The crews, diving from a common circle, destroyed two batteries and many enemy soldiers by bombs and cannon and machine gun fire. Then the 6th shak with the forces of 77 aircraft made a concentrated attack against concentrations of enemy troops at the crossings over the Narew River. As a result, the enemy suffered great losses in personnel and military equipment.

Particularly effective operations were carried out by a group of 16 Il-2 of the commander of the 765th shap Lt Col V. G. Zapozdra, as well as the groups led by the experienced assault plane pilots Hero of the Soviet Union Lt Col A. G. Nakonechnikov, Maj S. P. Barilo and Capts M. I. Burkov, L. I. Yufa and A. F. Kozhevanov. The 2d Guards shad supported the committing of the 1st Guards Tank Corps into the breach and its advance.

The enemy which was threatened by the piercing of its defenses on the Pultusk center sent aviation to this area. On 5 September in the area of the advancing troops in 33 air battles 34 fascist aircraft were shot down. A certain notion of the air situation can be gained by the following episodes.

Three groups of five IIs from the 78th Guards shap (leaders Hero of the Soviet Union Maj Ye. A. Mikhalenikov, Capts N. I. Gribov and L. I. Yufa) escorted by 14 Yaks on the way to the target encountered 10 FW-190. The cover fighters engaged them. The assault planes over the target were attacked by a second group of 10 enemy fighters. A defensive circle had to be formed and numerous attacks by the enemy aviation driven off. During the battle pilot Gribov and the gunners from the crews of K. S. Shibalkov and L. I. Yufa shot down three fighters. However the fascists did not break off but continued to constantly attack the assault planes endeavoring to disrupt their defensive circle. And only one element of enemy fighters succeeded in shooting down the aircraft of Lt V. A. Makarov due to a disruption of fire support between the assault planes. The cover fighters at this time had engaged another group of Fokker-Wulfs and this also was a mistake.

On the same day, a group of six Il-2 under the command of Guards Capt V. F. Kolennikov in heading toward the region of Pultusk encountered eight FW-190 which the cover fighters engaged in combat. On approaching the target the assault planes detected enemy tanks and having formed a circle attacked them. At the same time they had to repel attacks by a second group of fascist fighters. Here with well organized firing by the air gunners, at first one Fokker-Wulf was shot down and then Capt Kolennikov finished off one other enemy fighter. The group of assault planes having carried out the mission returned to their airfield without losses.

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As a rule, our bombers and assault planes on the way to and in the area of the target maintained close battle formations creating a powerful fire barrier against the enemy fighters, and because of this they succeeded in driving off the enemy and avoiding losses in the air.

By the end of 6 September, the troops on the right wing of the front with active air support, having overcome stubborn enemy resistance, reached the Narew River, they crossed it and dug in on a bridgehead in the region of Pultusk. In the interests of the advancing armies, during the period from 3 through 6 September, the assault planes made 1,300 sorties and the same number by the fighters.

According to the responses from the combined-arms command, the aviation operated successfully. In an order to the troops of the 48th Army of 5 September thanks were stated to the commander of the 11th Guards shad Guards Lt Col V. P. Khrumchenko and to all the personnel of the division for outstanding actions in piercing the German defenses to the west of Ostrow Mazowiecka and in the battles for the bridgehead on the Narew River.

The response from the command of the 65th Army on the operations of the 2d Guards shad during the period from 3 through 8 September noted: "In the course of combat the assault planes carried out 564 sorties, they caused the enemy significant losses in equipment and personnel, thereby aiding the troops in piercing the enemy defenses, in reaching the Narew River and in capturing and holding a bridgehead. The military council of the army views the actions of the 2d Guards shad as excellent."<sup>1</sup>

This division received a similar positive response on actions from 10 through 19 September from the command of the 47th Army.

The operations of the army were also praised by Mar SU K. K. Rokossovskiy: "In these battles our glorious 16th AA from beginning to end held air superiority. Only solitary German aircraft were able to make attacks, as they say, around the corner."<sup>2</sup>

In the second 10 days of September, the troops of the 47th Army conducted an operation to wipe out the Warsaw forward defense area of the Germans and to liberate the Warsaw suburb of Praga from the Nazi occupiers. The 221st bad and the 9th Guards nbad, the 2d and 11th Buards shad, the 6th iak and the 282d iad were assigned to support and cover the troops. The troop offensive was preceded by the operations of the 9th Guards nbad which during three nights attacked objectives to the east of Praga for the purpose of wearing down enemy personnel and destroying military equipment.

At dawn of 10 September, the 2d and 11th Guards shad began intensive air reconnaissance in the area of operations. During the day for supporting the advancing troops, 75 airplanes from the 11th Guards shad under the

<sup>1</sup> Arkhiv MO SSSR, folio 368, inv. 6476, file 269, sheet 336.

<sup>2</sup> K. K. Rokossovskiy, "Soldatskiy Dolg," p 289.

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cover of 77 fighters from the 282d iad made a concentrated attack against the artillery mortar batteries in the positions and enemy infantry in trenches in the regions of Glinki, Zelenki and Goclawek. The attack was carried out by four groups of assault planes consisting of subgroups of four-five aircraft. For neutralizing the surviving firing positions and centers of enemy resistance, groups of assault planes were summoned during the entire day by the VPU of the AA commander. The fliers of the 6th iak reliably covered the troops of the 47th Army.

On the following day the offensive was continued. The enemy put up fierce resistance to our troops. The assault planes in group attacks destroyed enemy weapons which were impeding the advance of our troops. The following example shows how effective were their actions. During the day two groups of eight planes from the 175th Guards shap under the command of Maj K. Ye. Strashnyy and Capt M. A. Prosvirnov attacked artillery positions in the region of Svekerki, Czerniakow and Augustow. Soon the command of the 47th Army received affirmation that the assault planes had succeeded in destroying and neutralizing the fire of four 105- and 150-mm batteries and two batteries of enemy antiaircraft artillery which were impeding the advance of our troops on Praga.

Enemy resistance intensified as our troops approached the line of forests covering the forward defense area of Warsaw on the east. In line with this, Gen S. I. Rudenko decided to keep the enemy troops under constant tension in the regions of Zelenki, Nowe-Brudno, Saska Kempy by continuous actions of the light bombers during the night of 12 September for supporting the advancing troops. The fliers of the 9th Guards nbad during this night made 365 sorties. A staging airfield for the night bombers was equipped 10-12 km from the front line and the crews could make 10-12 sorties a night.

After the night bombers and the artillery softening up process, the day-time aviation made two concentrated strikes against the enemy artillery positions, strongpoints and personnel to the east of Praga. The first strike involved 285 aircraft, and the second 85. During the day individual groups of assault planes wiped out enemy weapons and infantry upon call from the VPU of the AA commander. As a total during the day, the aviation made 933 sorties. From the responses of the commanders of the 60th and 76th rifle divisions, the bombing and strafing attacks disorganized enemy resistance and the Soviet infantry captured the points of Zambki and Utrata.

During the night of 13 September, the night bombers continued to operate against the enemy troops for the purpose of wearing them down. And in the morning a concentrated attack by the forces of 104 aircraft was repeated. On this day, two groups of 34 aircraft from the 11th Guards shad led by Guards Maj K. Ye. Strashnyy and A. M. Vasil'yev particularly distinguished themselves. Regardless of the heavy opposition from enemy antiaircraft weapons, they destroyed three batteries and three armored vehicles, they blew up an ammunition dump and a fuel train, they neutralized the fire of two batteries of field artillery and five antiaircraft batteries, and they wiped out hundreds of enemy soldiers and officers.

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The deputy squadron commander of the Guards shap Maj A. M. Vasil'yev on 15 May 1946 was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union for carrying out 118 combat sorties, as a result of which the enemy suffered great losses.

The coordinated actions by the infantry and artillery troops, the tanks and fliers, the Soviet soldiers and Polish fighters brought success. By the end of 14 September, the troops of the 47th Army had crushed the stubborn enemy resistance and captured the fortress of Praga, a suburb of Warsaw. In the evening upon the order of the Supreme Command-in-Chief, Moscow saluted the valorous troops of the First Belorussian Front, including the outstanding fliers from the formations and units of Gens Komarov, Dzusov and Tatanashvili, Cols Rasskazov and Berkal', Lt Cols Khrumchenko and Isayev and Capt Vorob'yev.

For successful combat, the 282d iad (commander Col Yu. M. Berkal') was awarded the Order of the Red Banner, while the 248th and 739th iap, the 98th okrap and the 23d Guards nbap (commanders Lt Cols V. S. Mukhin, V. F. Klimov, I. S. Tishchenko, P. S. Leonov) received the honorary name of Praga. The 45th Guards nbap (commander Lt Col A. A. Menyayev) received the Order of Suvorov Third Degree while the 79th Guards and the 658th shap as well as the 721st iap (commanders Maj V. Ye. Nedel'ko, and Lt Cols E. V. Viyk and N. M. Kosnikov) received the Order of Alexander Nevskiy.

For supporting the troops of the 47th Army, the aviation carried out around 2,500 combat sorties, including 1,100 by night bombers and 98 by daylight bombers, 600 by assault planes and over 700 by fighters.

But the sorties by the aviators were not always successful. At times the pilots had to experience the bitterness of defeats and the loss of friends. In the air battles in the sky over Warsaw and in the battles for Praga, many famous pilots perished, including the assistant commander of the 6th iak for the gunnery service Maj P. P. Lunkin, the commander of the 67th Guards iap Lt Col A. B. Panov, flight commander Lt V. P. Karpezin, the deputy squadron commander of the 174th Guards shap Lt M. T. Fedorov, and many others.

Maj P. P. Lunkin on 11 September during "free hunting" in the region of Warsaw attacked a fascist He-111 reconnaissance plane. When the ammunition had run out, Lunkin made a ram. At an altitude of 3,000 meters, he struck the right wing of the Heinkel from behind and below with the wing of his own Yak. The enemy aircraft in breaking apart fell on our territory. The uncontrollable Yak after the ram went into a spin. Lunkin bailed out but due to arm injuries he was unable to use his parachute.

Lt Col A. B. Panov on 12 September in an air battle shot down two fascists. But his aircraft was also damaged. Panov made a forced landing. The fighter hit hard on the ground which was broken up by craters and trenches and nosed into an embankment. The flier was caught in the cockpit. Nearby cavalry troops ran up to help. The aircraft caught fire and shells began to explode. It was impossible to save the flier.



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Aleksay Borisovich Panov was a favorite in the regiment. Until the end of his life he devoted all his energy to serving the beloved motherland and in the regiment he trained more than 10 Heroes of the Soviet Union. His chest was decorated with nine governmental decorations. Guardsman A. B. Panov made 241 combat sorties, he carried out 41 air battles and personally shot down 14 enemy aircraft. For outstanding leadership of the regiment, for courage, valor and bravery shown in combat against the enemy, A.B. Panov posthumously was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

Simultaneously with the supporting of the troops, the formations of the 16th AA also provided aid to the Warsaw rebels.

As is known, on 1 August 1944, upon a signal from the reactionary Polish government which had emigrated to London, an armed revolt started in Warsaw and this was led by the anti-Soviet command of the Kraiowa army. The inhabitants of Warsaw immediately joined the revolt as they burned with a desire to more rapidly drive the Nazi occupiers out of Poland. The leaders of the revolt did not coordinate their actions with the command of the Red Army and did not supply the rebels with the needed amount of weapons and ammunition. Their main aim was to prevent the victory of popular power in Poland.

At this time the basic forces of the First Belorussian Front were conducting heavy battles against the enemy still far from Warsaw. Only by mid-September, when the troops of the front reached the Narew and Vistula, and also with the capturing of the Warsaw suburb of Praga on 14 September were conditions created for providing direct aid to the insurgents.

By that time the situation for the insurgents in Warsaw had grown very difficult. Only on 17 September did the leaders of the revolt decide via London to turn to the Soviet government for aid. Somewhat earlier, on 12 September, two representatives of the insurgents, Elena Jaworska and Janina Jancezak, appeared before the command of the First Belorussian Front asking for help from the Red Army.

The Supreme Commander-in-Chief, having made certain from a report by the troop commander of the First Belorussian Front that the front was unable at present to undertake an offensive operation to liberate Warsaw, since the troops as a result of almost continuous 3-month offensive actions were exhausted, still proposed to provide whatever help possible to the insurgents.

The 16th AA was entrusted by the command with delivering weapons, ammunition, food and medicines to the insurgents. Our aviation for the first time encountered the mission of assisting insurgents under the conditions of a large city. Tactical procedures had to be found which would make it possible to drop cargo precisely on the destination, and this was possible only from altitudes of 150-200 meters. Only our nighttime Po-2 bombers could successfully carry out this mission. For this reason the mission was entrusted to the 9th Guards nbad (commander Col K. I. Rasskazov).

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Incidentally, the English also made an attempt to supply the insurgents by air. During the day of 18 September, their airplanes dropped up to 1,000 cargo parachutes from an altitude of 4,500 meters in the Warsaw region, but only 20 of them fell on insurgent positions and the remainder reached the Germans.

The start of air operations to aid the insurgents was impeded by the establishing of contact with them. This mission was entrusted to the 2d Guards shad. The division commander selected the best crews and organized sorties by individual IIs. The flights were made under the cover of fighters at altitudes from 300 to 15 meters over the rooftops of the city. On 13 September, at 1630 hours, Guards Maj S. T. Borshchev from a low-level flight dropped pennants to the insurgents in the area to the east of Marymont. In a second pass he saw the rebels raise the pennants and salute the flier. On this day the assault planes made 18 sorties and dropped 70 pennants with the following letter in Russian:

"The Red Army sends combat greetings to the heroic fighters of Warsaw! In approaching the walls of Warsaw, we have been able to give you fraternal aid. Tonight ammunition and food will be dropped in your positions. For this you must set out three bonfires in a triangle on Lelewel Square or in other open places in this area. The airplanes will appear at 0930 hours. The cargo will be dropped without parachutes in special packaging. In order that they not miss, you must locate the fires in the center of your positions and over the entire area place people to observe the falling point of the cargo and to collect them. The cargo will be dropped the entire night. If you receive this note and understand everything, then at 0630 hours lay out a white sheet on the roof of one of the buildings. Our airplanes will see this signal. Your delegates have arrived.

"Command of the Red Army at Warsaw."<sup>1</sup>

During the night of 14 September, our pilots, having made 644 sorties, dropped 45 tons of food, 500 automatics, 60 mortars, 6,020 grenades and other military supplies. According to the observations of the crews, the dropped cargo fell on the spot.

In the following days the insurgents maintained contact with the night bombers by the established signals. But talks using signals were clearly unreliable. Men had to be dropped with radios. The first three paratroopers were dropped during the night of 18 September on Lelewel Square by the best fliers of the 9th Guards nbap, by the guardsman Capt V. P. Starostin (he was killed in carrying out a mission on 16 October 1944), by Sr Lt Ya. A. Lyashenko and Lt K. F. Mikhalenko. The flight commander of the 45th Guards nbap K. F. Mikhalenko during the years of the war made 997 successful combat sorties for bombing, reconnaissance, transporting cargo, for dropping paratroopers into the enemy rear and for evacuating wounded, showing valor and courage in so doing; subsequently he was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

<sup>1</sup> Arkhiv MO SSSR, folio 368, inv. 6476, file 359, sheets 301-302.

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The dropping of the paratroopers and cargo from the Po-2 aircraft was carried out from altitudes of not more than 200 meters. Special Po-2 aircraft were assigned for suppressing the enemy antiaircraft weapons. In delivering cargo to the Warsaw rebels, the night fliers demonstrated many examples of valor and self-sacrifice.

During the night of 17 September, the crew of the 44th Guards nbad consisting of Guards Jr Lts P. V. Ovcharov and G. P. Prokoshev, respectively, pilot and navigator, having dropped their load to the insurgents were returning to their airfield. In the darkness at an altitude of 700 meters it collided with a Po-2 aircraft from another unit which was heading out on a mission. The airplanes struck wings and breaking up in the air began to fall out of control. Navigator Prokoshev bailed out and landed on the roof of one of the houses in Praga. But the pilot snagged his parachute on a fragment of the aircraft and damaged its canopy. Ovcharov landed at increased speed, and as a consequence of this in hitting the roof of a four-story building sustained a severe injury to his legs, he was caught by the parachute straps and hung unconscious until morning when with the aid of the inhabitants he could be taken off the roof and sent to the hospital.

During the night of 26 September, the navigator of a crew of a Po-2 from the 23d Guards nbad Jr Lt M. A. Vetrov, in dropping cargo to the rebels was wounded by enemy incendiary bullets. His flying suit caught fire. The pilot Maj A. P. Sadilov after carrying out the mission made a forced landing, he extinguished the burning clothing of the navigator, he took off again and delivered the mortally wounded comrade to his unit.

The night bombers from 13 September through 1 October made 3,475 sorties for delivering cargo to the rebels and for suppressing enemy antiaircraft weapons in Warsaw. Here four aircraft and five crew members were lost from enemy antiaircraft artillery; in addition, 14 aircraft sustained damage. As a total the aviators of the 16th AA dropped for the Warsaw insurgents: One 45-mm antitank gun, 156 mortars, 505 antitank guns, 2,667 automatics, rifles and carbines, 41,780 grenades, 51,840 mines, around 3 million rifle and pistol cartridges, 515 kg of medicines, 113.5 tons of food, more than 1,000 kg of tobacco goods, 10 telephones, 1 switchboard and other military supplies.<sup>1</sup>

The best crews which transported cargo to the insurgents were Guardsmen Maj A. P. Sadilov and Sr Lt V. I. Semenov, Lts S. A. Petrov, V. S. Khromin, I. I. Kolomeyets, P. S. Ponomarev, M. Z. Shmatko, P. S. Yasinskiy, N. K. Piven' and others.

For the excellent fulfillment of the mission of establishing contact with the Warsaw insurgents, the flight commander of the 59th Guards, shap Lt V. A. Milyukov was awarded the Order of the Red Banner and the gunner Sr Sgt M. I. Savichev received the Order of Glory. Guardsman V. A. Milyukov during the war years successfully carried out 138 combat sorties, having destroyed many Nazis and much military equipment. For this on 15 May 1946 he was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

<sup>1</sup> Arkhiv MO SSSR, folio 368, inv. 6476, file 269, sheets 135-136.  
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The fighters of the 16th AA, along with supporting the troops of the front, from 13 September covered the rebel-occupied regions of Warsaw against fascist air bombing. Moreover, during the period of 16-19 September, fighters from the 6th Iak made 14 strafing attacks on enemy aircraft at the airfields of Okence and Modlin, and it was from here that German aviation raided the areas occupied by the Warsaw insurgents.

The support for the Polish patriots by the Soviet fliers inspired them to unstinting battle. However the forces were too unequal.

The Warsaw revolt at the end of September ended tragically. The leaders of the revolt refused joint actions with the Red Army and units of the 1st Polish Army, the commando subunits of which had crossed the Vistula on 16 September. The leaders of the Army Krajowa surrendered to the Nazi occupiers and then prohibited their detachments from breaking through to meet the Polish and Soviet troops.

"In endeavoring to remain in power no matter what the cost and to prevent the progressive development of the nation, the Polish reaction carried out an act of unprecedented treachery against the people, having shown their true face of an evil enemy of the workers and a servant of international capital."<sup>1</sup>

In September 1944, in carrying out various missions, the 16th AA made 13,034 combat sorties. In 135 air battles the Soviet pilots shot down 117 enemy aircraft and destroyed 15 on the ground.<sup>2</sup> The enemy suffered high losses in personnel and military equipment from the bombing and strafing attacks.

At the start of September our troops had captured a bridgehead in the area of Pultusk on the bank of the Narew River. The fascist command resolved to eliminate it. On the morning of 4 October, the enemy after very strong artillery softening up threw up to 200 tanks supported by artillery and infantry into the attack. The troops of the 65th Army had to wage heavy defensive battles against superior enemy forces. Moreover because of the bad weather they were deprived of air support. As a result of 2-day battles the enemy succeeded in constricting our units on the bridgehead at a price of high losses.

The low solid clouds at altitudes of 50-100 meters and the fogs on 4 and 5 October did not permit our aviation from taking off.

From the morning of 6 October, the assault planes of the 11th Guards shad made several sorties. But because of poor visibility they did not find the targets and turned back. Two IIs from the 174th Guards shap piloted

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<sup>1</sup> "Istoriya KPSS" [History of the CPSU], Vol 5, book 1, Moscow, Politizdat, page 600.

<sup>2</sup> Arkhiv MO SSSR, folio 368, inv. 6476, file 359, sheets 348-349, 353.

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by P. A. Kurochkin and M. I. Pen'kov suffered a disaster in the fog. In the second half of the day, the weather improved somewhat. For supporting the troops of the 65th Army in repelling the fierce enemy attacks, small groups of assault planes were sent out from the 2d and 11th Guards shad under the cover of fighters from the 282d iad. Under the difficult weather conditions the assault planes made 132 sorties. These air strikes against the advancing enemy were very timely. In suffering high losses from the stubbornly defending troops of the 65th Army and the air strikes, the enemy was forced to halt.

In the second half of the day of 7 October, the weather improved somewhat. The commander of the AA sent larger groups of bombers and assault planes under fighter cover to aid the troops of the 65th Army. These groups attacked enemy troops in a series of heavy strikes and this forced the enemy to break off the attacks. Our infantrymen, in coming out of their trenches, could observe the air operations. A total of 829 sorties were made. As a result of the bombing and strafing attacks, 26 tanks, 28 guns and 87 motor vehicles were destroyed and damaged, 2 fuel dumps were blown up, and many hundreds of enemy soldiers were wiped out and scattered. In 13 air battles, 5 enemy aircraft were shot down. The enemy felt strikes of the same strength on 8 October. The air operations largely contributed to the favorable outcome of the battles on the Serock bridgehead.

During this period, the bombers of the 221st bad and the 9th Guards nbad operated particularly effectively. In the battles of 7-14 October, groups of assault planes under the command of Capt F. A. Dronov (41st shap), the commander of the 58th Guards shap Hero of the Soviet Union Lt Col V. D. Panfilov and his guardsmen Capt Hero of the Soviet Union I. A. Naumenko, Capts G. V. Dubov and A. F. Kozhevanov, Sr Lts G. I. Tvauri and B. G. Rossokhin (59th Guards shap), S. I. Gurvich (174th Guards shap) and A. S. Kirillov (41st shap), Capt M. A. Prosvirnov and Lt I. F. Fateyev (175th Guards shap) also distinguished themselves. The six last fliers subsequently were awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union for combat feats. Each of them made 110-140 successful combat sorties and by their attacks caused the enemy great losses.

For the more effective use of assault planes, the 198th shad was rebased to the airfield of Wyszkw, 20 km behind the front line. The troops had high praise for the its operations as is substantiated by the lines from the following order: "During 7-9 October, regardless of the bad weather conditions, the 198th shad of Col V. I. Belousov provided great aid to the troops of the 65th Army which were waging difficult and stubborn battles against major enemy forces on the left bank of the Narew River in the region to the south of Pultusk. Under difficult conditions the fliers continuously destroyed concentrations of enemy tanks, infantry and equipment, showing courage and an excellent knowledge of their job. I order that thanks be expressed to all the personnel of the 198th shad for the operations and help provided to the troops of the 65th Army in stubborn and difficult

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battles against large enemy tank and infantry forces in the region to the south of Pulutsk. Troop commander of the 65th Army Col Gen Batov. Member of the Military Council Maj Gen Radetskiy. Chief of Staff Lt Gen Bobkov."<sup>1</sup>

For repelling enemy attacks on the bridgehead from 4 through 14 October, under conditions of limited flying weather, the 16th AA made 1,100 sorties. Of the 300 destroyed and hit enemy tanks, aviation was responsible for 85. Moreover, 70 guns and much other equipment were also destroyed.

Having repelled the enemy attacks and having caused it heavy losses, the troops of the 65th Army on 14 October began the battles to broaden the Serock bridgehead. The air battles under the difficult weather conditions during the day and at night provided support for the troops in destroying the enemy on the battlefield and preventing the delivery of ammunition. Here a decisive role was played by the assault planes from the 6th shak and the 2d and 11th Guards shad.

An example of their bold and tenacious efforts could be the sortie on 15 October of a group consisting of 18 IIs from the 175th Guards shad led by Hero of the Soviet Union Maj D. I. Smirnov for the attacking objectives in the region of Pobytkowo Duze. Smirnov ordered that the bombs not be dropped on the first pass but rather first to determine the objectives to be hit. On the second pass the assault planes neutralized the fire of two antiaircraft batteries and having formed a general circle, began to strafe the artillery mortar batteries, the tanks, motor vehicles and infantry in the trenches. Each crew independently selected a target and attacked it. After the eight pass the ammunition had run out. A ninth pass was made by the group for the moral support of our troops. The enemy suffered great losses.

Due to the effective air strikes and the offensive elan of the troops, the units of the 65th Army squeezed the enemy and captured advantageous lines.

The fighter aviation was covering its troops and attacking enemy airfields. On 14 October at dawn the commander of the 6th iak Gen I. M. Dzusov upon the order of the AA commander organized a fighter raid on the Modlin airfield, where up to 35 enemy aircraft were discovered. Three groups of six planes from the 352d iap took off under the command of Capt B. G. Deyev and I. Ye. Lisovski (both in the spring of 1945 did not return from a mission) and Lt V. K. Korzun. From the report of the crews, 11 enemy aircraft were set afire at the airfield. On the following day, a second raid was organized. As a result the Modlin airfield was cleared of enemy aviation.

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<sup>1</sup> Arkhiv MO SSSR, folio, 368, inv. 6476, file 359, sheets 420-421.

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Simultaneously with the battles occurring at the bridgehead in the area of Serock, the units of the 70th, 47th and 1st Polish armies from 10 October were carrying out an offensive for the purpose of capturing the interfluvium of the Vistula, Bug and Narew. The 16th AA, in addition to ordinary air softening up before an attack by our troops, fought continuously against the enemy personnel and weapons, escorting the advancing infantry with their fire.

The troops of the 47th Army were given great support by the assault planes from the 11th Guards shad. The flight of Capt M. I. Kuchinskiy (173d Guards shap) appeared over the target at a moment when the enemy mortars were blocking the path for our troops in the region of Weliszew. The infantrymen did not expect the assault planes in such weather. "We had already passed the second enemy trench when the red-starred assault planes appeared over our heads," the grateful soldiers wrote later. "The appearance of the glorious Soviet aces over the battlefield inspired all our soldiers and commanders. Not noticing the fatigue, we dashed forward destroying the retreating fascists on the move. At this time enemy mortar batteries opened fire from the edge of the forest. However they were not able to fire for long. Three of our assault planes dove out of the clouds and in a dive destroyed the German mortar troops."

The guardsmen fliers also received high praise from the command of the 70th Army: "The 11th Guards shad in close coordination with the troops, from 10 through 14 October, made 344 sorties, a portion of them under difficult weather conditions. The successful operations of the division significantly aided the army in carrying out the mission of the command. We would particularly like to note the bold, efficient and energetic activities carried out by the commander of the 11th Guards shad, Guards Lt Col A. G. Nakonechnikov who excellently carried out the mission assigned to him and was able to organize proper coordination between the aviation and ground forces and also prompt retargeting of it under the conditions of the changing operational situation."

In October, the light bombers also provided effective support to the advancing troops of the front, and they at night held the enemy troops in a fixed position, as did the bombers of the 221st bad which made crushing attacks against the enemy during the day. On 14 October, the 221st bad in nine groups of six-nine Pe-2 aircraft in each with an interval of 3-5 minutes and with direct escort by fighters at altitudes of 2,000-2,900 meters made three concentrated attacks on enemy artillery and infantry in the area to the north of Warsaw. Regardless of the intensive fire by the enemy anti-aircraft artillery, the bombers carried out the mission. On 15 October, the division successfully made two attacks: the first with nine groups against artillery to the north of Warsaw, and the second with eight groups against artillery in the area to the southwest of Pultusk. On 25 October, nine groups of six-nine Pe-2 aircraft successfully bombed enemy troops at Nasielsk station.

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During the period of carrying out particular offensive operations by the combined-arms armies the aviation was controlled over the battlefield as it had been in the course of the Belorussian Operation. The commander of the AA and his deputy for combat training (from October 1944, Hero of the Soviet Union Maj Gen Avn A. S. Senatorov) with small groups of officers, as a rule, were located at observation posts (or near them) of the commanders of the combined-arms armies. Here also were the commanders for the cooperating air formations. The officers of their staffs (the air controllers) were in the troops at the observation posts of the commanders of the corps and divisions, and in mobile formations they were in the forward detachments.

The commanders of the air formations and their representatives had radios for contracting their airfields and the aircraft in the air. Such a system ensured precise and uninterrupted control of the aviation during the most intense situation. Among the air controllers particularly distinguishing themselves were Majs I. P. Malyutin (11th Guards shad), I. I. Dvornikov (199th shad), Capt V. S. Mitin (198th shad) and others who were awarded combat orders for skillful control of assault plane actions.

The successful fulfillment of the missions by the personnel of the 2d and 11th Guards shad, the 3d bak, the 6th sak, the 6th shak, the 6th and 13th lak, the 221st bad, the 283d and 286th iad, the 9th Guards nbad, the 16th odrap and other formations and units was achieved both by the able actions of the commanders and their staffs as well as by active, informative and purposeful political work by the party and Komsomol organizations under the leadership of the chiefs of the political departments and deputy commanders for political affairs: Cols V. M. Bogovitskiy, M. M. Drobinskiy, A. P. Dergunov, I. D. Kobayakin, P. M. Tupanov, D. I. Nikulin, A. S. Nikul'shin, F. P. Plakhott', G. A. Sherokhin and V. Z. Gul'tyayev, Lt Cols F. I. Zhurbenko and M. N. Korolev, as well as the chiefs of the political departments of the 56th, 79th, 25th, 75th, 80th, 28th, 36th RAB Cols G. A. Alekseyev and I. P. Rednikov, Lt Cols I. N. Ovchinnikov, S. F. Titov, Ye. Ye. Shirochenkov and S. K. Shakhmetov, Maj P. P. Vorontsov, and others.

In October, the 16th AA, in having about 800 battleworthy crews, made 14,648 combat sorties. In 189 air battles, 98 enemy aircraft were shot down and 13 enemy aircraft were destroyed at airfields.<sup>1</sup> The enemy suffered high losses in military equipment and personnel.

The fliers of many air formations proved to be experts at air combat and bombing and strafing attacks. For excellent execution of missions a large number of aviators received orders. A number of air units and formations received governmental decorations and honorary names. By an Ukase of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet of 26 October 1944, for the exemplary execution of the missions of the command and for the valor and heroism shown therein, the title of Hero of the Soviet Union was presented to the

<sup>1</sup> Arkhiv MO SSSR, folio 368, inv. 6476, file 359, sheets 443-444.



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following fliers and navigators of the 16th AA: Jr Lt S. Ya. Fil'chenkov, Lts N. V. Arkhangel'skiy (killed on 14 January 1945 in carrying out a mission), S. I. Gurvich, M. I. Pen'kov (posthumously), N. M. Rud' and M. T. Fedorov (posthumously), Sr Lts G. V. Balamutkin, N. S. Latskov, D. G. Miroshnichenko and A. U. Tikhov (killed on 16 April 1945 in carrying out a mission), Capts N. I. Belavin, F. I. Parshin and V. N. Yashin, Majs S. A. Kuznetsov and F. V. Khimich, and Lt Col N. K. Lysenko.

Each of them had shot down enemy aircraft, destroyed tanks, guns and other military equipment to their score. Thus, the squadron commanders of the 248th iap D. G. Miroshnichenko and the 133d iap V. N. Yashin made, respectively, 108 and 184 combat sorties and had won 15-16 victories each. The navigator of the 233d iap S. A. Kuznetsov made 227 combat sorties and personally shot down 19 fascist aircraft and eight in group action. The squadron commander of the 33d Guards shap N. I. Belavin, the deputy squadron commander of the 174th Guards shap G. V. Balamutkin and the flight commander of the same regiment M. I. Pen'kov made 80-100 combat sorties and each destroyed 10-20 tanks, 30-40 guns and knocked out a large number of enemy soldiers and officers.

Many fliers from the shad will recall the instructor of the training regiment M. I. Tolstova. She helped them rapidly master the Il-s assault plane. Initially certain pilots were amazed that their instructor was a woman. But with each flight they gained respect for their instructor who had mastered the armored aircraft.

Mariya Il'inichna Tolstova had been left without her parents in childhood. After completing boarding school and working at a railroad station in 1938, Mariya Tolstova became a student pilot and then an instructor at an air club. In order to reach the front, pilot Tolstova agreed to become a medical instructor in a rifle division. She had carried more than 100 wounded soldiers off the battlefield. Her military service had been commended by the medal "For Valor." In 1943, Mariya Il'inichna was allowed to go into aviation, and she soon was appointed an instructor in a training regiment. For the retraining of flight personnel she was awarded the Order of the Red Star. But Tolstova wanted a combat regiment, and at the end of 1944 her dream came true. As part of the 175th Guards shap, communist Lt Tolstova carried out 42 combat missions. For combat distinction she was awarded two Orders of the Red Banner and many medals. After demobilizing she was willingly accepted in civil aviation where she flew until 1959. At present Mariya Il'inichna works in the town of Kol'chugino in Vladimirskaya Oblast.

In a number of operations the 16th AA included over 20 air divisions (in the Berlin Operation, up to 30 air divisions). Some of them participated in one or two operations and were then shifted to other fronts. But 12 air divisions including the 1st Guards (the former 220th), the 234th, 273d, 282d, 283d and 286th iad, the 2d Guards (the former 228th) and the 299th (renamed the 11th Guards) shad, the 221st, 241st and 301st bad, as well

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as the 271st nbad (which became the 9th Guards) starting from the Stalin-grad and Kursk battles up to the end of the Great Patriotic War fought constantly as part of the 16th AA. They were highly battleworthy, they successfully carried out all the missions and were the basic core of the air army.

One such division was the 2d Guards shad. Its personnel fought heroically at Stalingrad and on the Kursk Bulge, and then in all operations to the Elbe. This air division 16 times received thanks in the orders of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief. For the successful execution of missions and the mass heroism shown by the personnel, the air division became a guards unit, and received the Order of Lenin, the Red Banner and the Order of Suvorov, Second Degree. It was also given the honorary names of Chernigov and Rechitsa. Around 1,000 soldiers received governmental decorations. In 1944 alone, the air division made 6,497 combat sorties. From its ranks came 30 Heroes of the Soviet Union including the glorious guardsman pilots Lts Cols A. G. Nakonechnikov and M. G. Sklyarov, Majs V. M. Golubev, G. I. Kopayev and V. F. Khokhlachev, Capts A. A. Bondar' and A. I. Kadomtsev, Sr Lt Yu. N. Zykov, Lts I. F. Bibishev, A. S. Cherezov and the division commander Guards Maj Gen Avn G. O. Komarov.

Special mention must be given to the native of Rostovskaya Oblast, the worker machinist then outstanding flier and excellent commander, Maksim Gavrilovich Sklyarov who was a communist from 1938. He completed the Voroshilov-grad Military School as a flier in 1936, and before the war had completed the courses for military flier-commissars. The senior political worker M. G. Sklyarov was a participant in the Great Patriotic War from its very outset in the position of a squadron military commander and then the navigator of an air regiment. During the days of the intense battles for Stalingrad, he joined the command of the 688th shap which subsequently became the 59th Guards shap. The personnel of the regiment trained by the brave and totally loyal communist, M. G. Sklyarov excelled in organization and combat skills, boldness and tenacity in carrying out combat missions. For excellent execution of the missions of the command and able leadership over the shap, Guards Lt Col M. G. Sklyarov in June 1944 was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. By this time he had made over 100 combat sorties and was wounded four times. After the war Maj Gen Avn M. G. Sklyarov commanded air formations, he completed the Academy of the General Staff with a gold medal and a diploma with honors, and he directed the combat training of the Air Force Aviation. At the peak of his powers and abilities he passed on in 1958.

The operations to liberate Belorussia and the eastern regions of Poland carried out in the course of the summer-autumn campaign of 1944 by the troops of the First Belorussian Front and the other fronts in terms of their results were outstanding victories for the Soviet Armed Forces.

The personnel of the 16th AA by their active support for the troops of the First Belorussian Front made a weighty contribution to these victories.

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During the period of April-October 1944, the air formations of the 16th AA made 73,314 combat sorties, including: 22,905 by the fighters, 17,813 by the assault plane, 20,267 by the bombers, 3,431 by the reconnaissance planes and 1,898 by the Polish Air Division. The combat sorties in terms of missions were distributed as follows: 9,812 for covering the troops and intercepting enemy aircraft, 28,937 for bombing and strafing attacks on enemy troops, 10,273 for air reconnaissance, 15,344 for escorting bombers and assault planes, 4,818 for actions against airfields, railroads, bridges and river crossings, and 4,130 for special missions. Simultaneously up to 135 noncombat sorties were made (training flights, ferrying, liaison and so forth).

During this period over 1.6 million bombs and rockets were dropped on the enemy, and around 2.7 million leaflets in the enemy rear.

As a result of the bombing and strafing attacks, damage or losses were caused to: over 800 tanks, armored personnel carriers and armored vehicles, around 1,800 guns of field and antiaircraft artillery, more than 12,000 motor vehicles, 1,300 locomotives, armored trains and cars, up to 60 airplanes at airfields; 301 ammunition and fuel dumps were blown up; many thousands of enemy soldiers and officers were killed.

Air superiority during virtually the entire summer and autumn campaign of 1944 was on the side of our aviation. It was achieved not only by the quantitative and qualitative superiority in aircraft equipment over the enemy, but mainly due to the high moral qualities of the flight personnel, the increase in their combat skills, the great activeness of our air units and to the able use of aviation in combat. The assault groupings of troops on the front were reliably covered from the air and were not substantially exposed to enemy aviation. The AA made around 17 percent of the daytime combat sorties for covering the troops. In 1,227 air battles the fliers of the army shot down 1,005 fascist aircraft.

The coordination of aviation with the ground forces as a rule was close and constant. Regardless of the significant difficulties arising as the troops of the front advanced rapidly, the air formations carried out the consistent rebasing and provided continuous support for the troops. Due to the careful working out of all the elements of cooperation, the troops designated the forward edge clearly, while the air controllers in the battle formations aided the pilots in quickly detecting the needed targets. The contact between the assault aviation and the forward detachments of the mobile troops was constant. The locating of the commander of the air army (or his representative) at the observation post of the commander of the combined-arms army made it possible for him to promptly have accurate data on the ground situation, and this ensured the most efficient use of aviation in the interests of the troops.

Air reconnaissance which took up to 14 percent of the sorties, in disclosing the system of enemy defenses, the troop grouping, the aviation and maneuvers, provided great help to the Soviet command and helped it take correct decisions for defeating the enemy.

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The air army by heavy bombing and strafing attacks provided tangible support to the ground forces, particularly in piercing enemy defenses, pursuing the retreating enemy, repelling its counterattacks, crossing rivers, capturing and holding bridgeheads, as well as in wiping up encircled groupings. Having carried out over 60 percent of the sorties for this purpose, aviation not only aided the ground forces but also in many instances had a decisive effect on the outcome of combat. Thus, the defeat of the surrounded Nazi grouping at Bobruysk was achieved in essence by the aviation independently. The aviation played a very important role in destroying the retreating Brest enemy grouping and in the struggle for the bridgeheads on the Vistula and Narew rivers.

The effective use and the tactical procedures of air operations were marked by a creative nature and diversity corresponding to the ground and air situation and to the nature of the targets and weather conditions. Concentrated bomber and assault plane attacks were widely used combined with wave operations in small groups which had an extended impact on the enemy. "Free hunting" became a practice for the assault planes and particularly for the fighters. The favorable air situation made it possible to use frequently the fighters for strafing ground targets.

For the first time in the war our aviation gained experience in the actions of the night Po-2 bombers to help the insurgents in such a major city as Warsaw.

The rear bodies of the AA played a particularly important role in these operations, and under the conditions of the rapid advance of the ground forces and separation from the basic supply depots, they carried out enormous and intense work to continuously support the combat of the air formations with all necessary means.

In the course of the operations, the air commanders, the political workers and the chiefs of all levels acquired combat experience, they improved their organization, and demonstrated an increased ability to conduct combat under various conditions.

As a result of the party political work which was widely developed in the air units, the political and moral state of the aviators in the AA, indoctrinated in a spirit of Soviet patriotism and burning hate for fascism, was high. Combat enthusiasm and high political awareness were inherent to the personnel. Courage and steadfastness, decisiveness and self-sacrifice in battles against the enemies of our socialist fatherland were the main traditions of the Soviet fliers. The communists and Komsomol members set an example of loyal serving of the Soviet people.

During the offensive from Zhlobin to Warsaw, the capital of our motherland, Moscow, 17 times saluted with artillery salvos the valorous troops of the First Belorussian Front, including the formations and units of the 16th AA which distinguished themselves.

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Loyalty to military duty, love for the motherland and hatred for the enemy gave rise to intrepidity and mass heroism among the personnel of the AA. For excellent execution of the missions of the command in combat against the Nazi invaders during the period of the summer-winter battles of 1944, several thousand men of the 16th AA received orders and medals. Thirty-eight fliers and navigators received the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. For the heroism and high organization shown in combat 20 air regiments, 10 air divisions and 3 air corps were awarded orders of the Soviet Union, 19 air regiments, 8 air divisions and 6 air corps received honorary names, while 5 air regiments and 2 air divisions which most distinguished themselves were turned into guards units.

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CHAPTER 4: FROM THE VISTULA TO THE ODER

Preparations for Combat

As a result of the victorious conclusion to the summer-autumn offensive operations in 1944, the Soviet troops in the Central sector had reached the Vistula and had captured bridgeheads on its western bank.

By mid-January 1945, the 9th German Field Army was on the defensive in front of the troops of the First Belorussian Front along the Vistula River in a zone up to 235 km wide. The army was supported by a grouping of the 6th Fascist Air Fleet numbering up to 450 airplanes (200 bombers, 150 fighters and 100 reconnaissance planes) which could be reinforced with 150-200 aircraft.

The troops of the First Belorussian Front (commander Mar SU G, K. Zhukov) from November 1944, upon instructions of Headquarters, commenced preparations for a new offensive operation which together with the troops of the adjacent fronts would liberate Poland, defeat the Nazi Army Group A, reach the Oder, and ensure conditions for making the final attack on Berlin. This operation was named Vistula-Oder.

Along with the troops of the front, the 16th AA also began to prepare for the operation.

By mid-November, the AA included: the 3d bak, the 6th shak, the 6th and 13th iak, the 221st bad, the 9th Guards nbad, the 2d and 11th Guards shad, the 282d and 286th iad, the 176th Guards iap, the 16th odrap, the 98th okrap and the 62d Guards trap of the GVF.

In addition, in preparing for the operation, from the Headquarters Reserve the AA received the 3d iak under the command of Hero of the Soviet Union Lt Gen Avn Ye. Ya. Savitskiy consisting of the 265th iad (291st, 402d and 812th iap) and the 278th iad (the 15th, 43d and 274th iap) under the command of Cols A. A. Koryagin and K. D. Orlov; the 9th shak headed by Maj Gen Avn I. V. Krupskiy and consisting of the 3d Guards and 300th shad (commanders Cols A. A. Smirnov and T. Ye. Kovalev); the 183d bad (the 319th,

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454th and 540th bap) under the command of Col M. A. Sitkin; the 242d nbad, the 1st Guards iad and the 72d orap (commanders Cols P. A. Kalinin, V. V. Sukhoryabov and Lt Col A. Ya. Gavril'chenko). These air formations and units (with the exception of the 183d bad) had rich traditions and solid combat experience.

As a total the army had 2,421 flying combat aircraft, including 330 day-time and 174 night bombers, 710 assault planes, 1,116 fighters, 91 reconnaissance planes and spotters. There were 2,140 combat-ready crews. Also in the zone of the First Belorussian Front the Air Force of the Polish Army was also ready for combat and this Air Force had been deployed on the basis of the 6th AA under the command of Hero of the Soviet Union Lt Gen Avn F. P. Polynin.

By the start of 1945, in all the AA regiments, the young flying personnel had been shaped up, permanent elements and groups had been organized, the formations and battle orders had been mastered, as well as the tactical procedures for executing various missions. Sniper crews of dive bombers and assault planes had been trained. As a total in November-December, the air units of the AA carried out 34,500 sorties for combat training.

At the same time the staff of the AA under the leadership of Lt Gen Avn P. I. Brayko (after the war, having completed the Academy of the General Staff, P. I. Brayko for many years was the chief of the Air Force Main Staff, and is now Col Gen Avn [Ret]) carried out extensive work to plan the use of aviation in the pending operation. The staff held a series of courses with officers from the staffs and services of the air formations. At them they worked through the questions of the command of aviation, the organizing of air reconnaissance, navigator support and the service of staffs.

At this time in the air formations basic attention was being given to instructing the flight personnel in the area of combat, organizing uninterrupted escorting of tanks, mastering the system for recognizing our own troops and the target indications, communications between airplanes and tanks (this was worked out at joint practical exercises), training the officers in air traffic control, the command of aviation in combat, and improving the tactics of conducting reconnaissance and transmitting intelligence data from the air.

In November, the troop commander of the front established the formations of the ground forces and aviation which were to interact between themselves. After this the commanders of them were able to work out in detail the procedure for joint operations in special exercises and practice on the spot in terms of the nature of the forthcoming action. Having received the missions ahead of time, together with their staffs they worked out the plans for coordination for the first days of the operation, the documents of troop control and the communications procedures.

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At the beginning of January, the commanders of the groups of all the air regiments traveled to the forward edge where they studied the terrain and the disposition of enemy weapons. The final element in training the commanders from the groups of the assault air divisions was the commander's personal reconnaissance conducted from the air not long before the offensive for clarying the targets and the methods of action against them.

The AA command assigned fighter air formations for cooperating with the assault planes and bombers in the following manner: the 6th iak with the 6th shak, the 13th iak with the 9th shak, the 1st Guards iad with the 3d bak, the 282d iad with the 2d Guards shad and the 183d bad, the 286th iad with the 11th Guards shad and the 221st bad. Their commanders and staffs worked through all the questions of cooperation at joint tactical conferences, exercises and practical flights.

After the command of the front had carried out a military game with the commanders and the chiefs of staff of the armies and the chiefs of their operations, reconnaissance and signals departments, on 25-27 December, the commander of the 16th AA conducted a similar exercise with the commanders and chiefs of staff of the air corps and divisions. The game was carried out using the real plan for the forthcoming operation and pursued the following aims: Elucidation of the missions in the operation, training in evaluating the situation and decision taking, working through interaction between the branches of aviation and with the mobile troops, the rebasing of aviation in the operation, as well as the control of aviation and the conducting of reconnaissance. In the course of the exercise, the AA commander gave practical instructions on the use of all branches of aviation in the forthcoming operation. This was a rehearsal for carrying out the missions posed by the troop commander of the front for the AA. The content of the exercises conducted on maps prior to the start of the operation was kept a deep secret.

At this time the particular attention of the command and the political bodies was focused on the moral and political preparation of the troops for the operation. Their presence outside Soviet territory obliged the soldiers and commanders to observe strictest order and carrying the honor of Soviet soldiers high. In line with the brilliant victories of the Red Army, a mood of overconfidence had appeared in certain units. In combating indifference, the workers of the political apparatus explained that the concluding operations would require great tension, valor and will for victory from all the men.

The political bodies, the party and Komsomol organizations instilled in the aviators and above all in the communists and Komsomol members, a responsibility for discipline, the battleworthiness of the unit and personal combat skills. The political bodies more efficiently than before along with the staffs generalized the combat experience, they introduced new tactical procedures and held tactical flying conferences. Meetings were organized between the assault plane pilots and the commanders of the combined-arms, tank and cavalry units and subunits.



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At the end of December, the command of the AA held a rally for the best fighters and assault planes, where reports were heard from many ace pilots who shared their combat experience.

Great attention was given to indoctrinating the young flight personnel in a spirit of the combat traditions of the unit. Talks were held by experienced fliers, they shared combat successes, they gave comradely advice, and taught not to fear the enemy but rather to seek him out and boldly destroy him. In the air units in a solemn ceremony the combat planes were turned over to the young fliers. The best fliers accompanied them in combat, and this encouraged the youth and they boldly accepted their baptism of fire.

The greatest political importance was given to an increase in the ranks of the Communist Party. In January, the 16th AA had 20,888 communists, including 13,810 party members and 7,078 candidate members, as well as 13,692 Komsomol members.<sup>1</sup>

Political agitation before the operation was carried out in all the air units under the slogan "Complete the Defeat of the Armed Forces of Fascist Germany and Raise the Banner of Victory Over Berlin!"

Information about what material harm the Nazi army had caused to our state and the atrocities of the fascist butchers on the temporarily occupied territory evoked burning hate for the Nazi invaders.

In the 347th iap, a questioning of 45 men was carried out. The replies indicated that all the persons questioned had suffered from the German occupiers. The flight commander Lt A. I. Semenchenko wrote that during the period of the occupation of the Ukraine, the German invaders had deported his sister for forced labor in Germany, they had destroyed the farm of his relatives and during the retreat had burned down the house. His brother had died at Voronezh. In the forthcoming battles he would avenge his brother and sister and the tortures of his relatives. The squadron commander Sr Lt I. Ye. Belov stated that during the war against the German monsters he had lost two brothers, a third had been wounded in the leg and was now an invalid. The Germans had burned the village down to the last house. His mother had been killed. His father joined the partisans and his fate was still unknown. Such questionnaires were hung up in prominent places in many air formations.

By the start of the operation, the AA rear services had 8 RAB headquarters, 55 bao, 10 motor transport battalions, 9 airfield air defense regiments and 8 antiaircraft machine gun companies, 1 air transport squadron, 8 airfield engineer battalions, 55 airfield technical companies and other rear units, repair bases and dumps.

In the operation the most important mission of the rear was to provide the air units with airfields and materiel.

<sup>1</sup> Arkhiv MO SSSR, folio 368, inv. 6476, file 55, sheet 78.

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By mid-January the army airfield service had rebuilt or built over 70 field airfields suitable for wintertime operations. By the start of combat, the army had 128 airfields and this met its needs. The air defense units covered 24 airfields out of the 48 in action.

For concealing the bases of our aviation, all airfields were carefully camouflaged and a network of dummy airfields was deployed. At 55 of them (including 28 around-the-clock ones) 818 dummy aircraft and special vehicles were set out. As a result over the 3 winter months, enemy aviation made 19 raids on the dummy airfields, having dropped around 700 bombs, while not a single bomb fell on the actual airfields.

Considering the experience of the Belorussian Operation, the command of the front and the AA gave great attention to the airfield maneuvering of the aviation with the commencement of operations. The planned high pace of advance required the repeated rebasing of the aviation behind the troops. The airfield maneuvering of the aviation was designed not only for the forces of the AA, but according to the order of the troop commander of the front, also to aid the combined-arms and tank armies.

All the airfields and areas of terrain ahead of the front suitable for airfields were photographed. The plan for the proposed basing of the aviation provided for the following: The creation of reconnaissance teams moving with the forward detachments of the tank armies; the assigning of the airfield engineering battalions and bao to the battle formations of the mobile troops; use of the forces and means of the cooperating mobile troops for help in building the airfields; the freeing of 20 percent of the rear units for immediate advancement ahead and the occupying of airfields abandoned by the enemy; the organization of support for the rebasing of our aviation. Each bao assigned to advance with the tank units was equipped with 5-day supplies for servicing an air regiment.

The plan also determined that two-thirds of the assault plane divisions, one-half of the fighter and bomber divisions, all the night bomber divisions and air reconnaissance regiments should be shifted first to the new airfields. The remaining air formations should make combat sorties from the initial base airfields as long as the operating radius permitted, after which they were assigned to the reserve of the front.

In accord with the plan, ammunition and fuel for 5 days of operations were transported to the operating airfields and dumps of the army; reserves for 5-8 days were organized at the army and front dumps. Considering the experience of the summer offensive, all the supplies were moved up to the Vis-tula. With the start of the offensive, each new airfield was to have ammunition and fuel for 1-2 days of action.

The air engineering service of the AA carried out extensive work to prepare for the operation. The basic efforts of the service were aimed at repairing malfunctioning aircraft at the rear airfields and at the places of forced landings. By mid-January only 2.7 percent of nonoperational planes

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remained. The engineer and technical personnel also did a great deal of work to teach the young fliers to operate the equipment intelligently.

The signal troops of the AA prepared very intensely for the operation. As a total the army had around 100 signals companies and one signals regiment as well as one air liaison squadron for serving the lying and rear units. The signals officers improved the warning system having increased the number of VNOS posts. Enemy detection radars were deployed at five fighter airfields. Information receivers from the air defense system of the front were installed at all the command posts of the airfields.

The AA was controlled from a communications center in Zelechow. The radio center of the army staff had 20 operating receivers. All air formations had a direct telegraph hookup with the cooperating formations of the ground forces. For controlling aviation on the battlefield, an observation point of the AA commander was organized at the point of Dombrowo which was in contact with the combined-arms and air formations, with the staff of the AA and with the airplanes in the air. Seven air radio networks were organized for controlling aviation on the battlefield; there was one for guidance and one for reconnaissance and five for coordinating the air formations of the branches of aviation. These measures were to ensure control of the aviation during the operation.

The other departments and services of the AA also carried out great preparatory work.

Simultaneously with the preparations for the offensive, a portion of the forces of the AA continued combat activities. They continuously carried out reconnaissance and fought enemy aviation, by "hunter" operations they prevented the movement of enemy troops along roads, and also carried out other missions of the front's command.

Due to the difficult weather conditions, the sorties were made by the best trained crews which, in addition to the basic mission, for example air reconnaissance, instigated air battles and strafed enemy trains and motor transport. In December alone, 1,100 attacks were made against the enemy by single aircraft and elements, including 170 attacks at night.

As a total for the period from 1 November 1944 through 13 January 1945, the AA made 3,796 combat sorties, including around one-half for air reconnaissance of the enemy. In 13 air battles in December, seven enemy aircraft were shot down. The army did not have any losses. Some 736 aircraft overflights were counted for enemy aviation.

For combating the enemy air scouts, the iad were assigned zones up to 80-100 km along the front, and each air regiment had elements on duty. The enemy aircraft were intercepted by the divisional radars. Sometimes sorties were made from the signals of the VNOS posts or "by eye." Due to these measures the grouping of our troops was not detected by enemy air reconnaissance.

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For repelling possible enemy air raids, fighter flights and squadrons were kept ready at the forward airfields.

Air reconnaissance during the preparations for the operation were to disclose the system of enemy defenses and determine the grouping of enemy troops and aviation. Over the 2 1/2 months there were only 9 days when vertical aerial photography could be carried out. However the air scouts during this time photographed enemy defenses along the Vistula line twice and three-four times around the bridgeheads. The forward edge of enemy defenses around the Magnuszew bridgehead were taken by oblique photography seven times from the air. The enemy airfields were photographed from five to sixteen times. Moreover, many other objectives were photographed. The materials of the aerial photographs were issued as maps to the troops and staffs.

In carrying out reconnaissance, the fliers from the 165th iap Capt A. I. Tokarev, Sr Lts V. A. Gogolev, V. D. Gusov, M. R. Yevtikhov and Jr Lt Ye. K. Krinitsyn, in carefully examining each clump of ground, detected the concentration areas of two enemy tank divisions.

Reconnaissance planes from the 16th odrap and 72d orap detected seven defensive lines between the Vistula and the Oder, they ascertained the airfield network and the group of enemy aviation, and they photographed all the crossings over the Vistula and other rivers. Here Maj's I. Ye. Velikiy and A. N. Krivoruchenko (by the end of the war he had carried out 154 combat sorties for which he was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union, and he is now a colonel in the reserves), Capt V. I. Davydov (he had 163 combat sorties, a Hero of the Soviet Union, killed in 1952), G. F. Makhrinov and A. I. Rengach, Sr Lts N. P. Kanishchev, G. Ye. Kul'manov (on 1 February 1945, he did not return from a mission), I. D. Khromov and Lt S. P. Komarov (by the end of the war he had 237 combat sorties and had become a Hero of the Soviet Union) particularly distinguished themselves. Here are a few of them.

Ivan Yefimovich Velikiy was born in 1916 in the Donets Basin in the family of a locomotive engineer. Having also become an engineer, he completed an air club without leaving his job. After completing the Voroshilovgrad Military Pilots School in 1939, communist I. Ye. Velikiy was an instructor pilot. During the Great Patriotic War, he participated in it from the very first, initially as a military commissar, and then a squadron commander in the 72d orap. He carried out the most crucial and difficult reconnaissance missions and was one of the first pilots to photograph Berlin. In February 1945, he was promoted to the position to commander of the 16th odrap. During the war years he made 119 combat missions. He was awarded many orders and medals. At present Lt Col (Res) I. Ye. Velikiy works as the assistant director of a machine plant in Gatchina.

The scout Sr Lt N. P. Kanishchev was born in a peasant family in Kurskaya Oblast. Having completed the Krasnodar Military Air Navigators School, the 20-year-old Komsomol member Kanishchev became an instructor. In participating in the Great Patriotic War from December 1941, he always carried out

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reconnaissance with outstanding results. In the summer of 1943 on one of the sorties his pilot Sr Lt N. Vorozhtsov was mortally wounded by sharpnel. Spotter-pilot Kanishchev took over the controls of the Pe-2 aircraft, he brought it back and landed safely at his airfield. For this flight he was awarded the Order of the Red Banner. For successful fulfillment of missions in 179 combat sorties, he was repeatedly awarded orders and medals. At present Col N. P. Kanishchev is the chief air navigator for one of the military districts.

G. F. Makhrinov, a native of Rostovskaya Oblast and a participant in the Great Patriotic War from its outset could be proud of enviable military service. Having learned to fly in an air club, in 1940, after completing the Voroshilovgrad Military Pilots School, the 19-year-old pilot arrived in the 72d bap. During the years of the war, Makhrinov proved to be a bold air fighter and a tenacious and courageous scout.

In May 1944, in carrying out a combat mission in the region of Brest, the controls were damaged on his Pe-2 by enemy antiaircraft guns. Regardless of this, communist Makhrinov brought the airplane back to the airfield and skillfully landed, having supplied very important information (at four airfields he had detected 240 enemy aircraft). Subsequently he repeatedly carried out with excellent results aerial photographing of railroad junctions, airfields, cities and defensive lines usually covered by heavy air defense weapons. During the years of the war, Capt Makhrinov carried out 199 combat sorties. For the valor and heroism shown in this, on 15 May 1946, he was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. Having successfully completed the Red Banner Air Force Academy in peacetime, he has commanded an air regiment and division. At present Maj Gen Avn Grigoriy Fedorovich Makhrinov is the deputy air commander of a district.

The air scouts for the period of the offensive were given the following missions: To provide continuous reconnaissance of the battlefield; to establish the concentration areas of enemy reserves and their moving up to the front; to detect the retreat of enemy troops; to discover the grouping of enemy aviation; to clarify the state of the river crossings and the system of the enemy's defensive lines.

The 16th and 72d orap were involved in carrying out operational reconnaissance during the operation, while the non-T/O reconnaissance squadrons of all the AA air divisions were to be involved in the tactical reconnaissance. As a total up to 250 aircraft were assigned for air reconnaissance and this should have met the need of the troops and aviation in all the major sectors.

In accord with the direction of Headquarters for the operation, the troop commander of the First Belorussian Front decided to make the main strike from the Magnuszew bridgehead (with the troops of the 61st, 5th Assault, 8th Guards and 3d Assault armies, the 1st and 2d Guards tank armies and the 2d Guards Cavalry Corps) in the direction of Kutno and Poznan; the second strike was to be made from the Pulawsk bridgehead (by the troops of the 69th and

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33d armies and by the 11th and 9th tank corps) in the general direction of Lodz; the third strike was to be made to the north of Warsaw (with troops from the 47th Army with assistance from a portion of the forces of the 1st Polish Army.

The main forces of the 16th AA were to support the ground forces advancing from the Magnuszew bridgehead. This sector was assigned the 2d Guards shad, the 6th shak and the 11th Guards shad, as well as the basic bomber forces including the 3d bak, the 183d bad and the 9th Guards nbad. The 3d iak was to cover the troops and crossings on the bridgehead; here the iad which escorted the bombers and assault planes were also to operate. Thus, 15 air divisions out of the existing 21 in the army were assigned for supporting the main troop grouping.

The 221st bad, the 242d nbad and the 9th shak were assigned to support the troops advancing from the Pulawsk bridgehead, and the 283d iad for covering the troops and crossings. This along with the escort fighters comprised six air divisions.

The troop actions to the north of Warsaw were to be supported by one regiment from the 2d Guards shad and the Air Force of the Polish Army.

By a decision of the AA commander it had been planned that 2 hours before the start of the offensive the light night bombers would attack the enemy staffs. More extended actions against the enemy were not planned in order to conceal the time our offensive was to start from the enemy.

With the start of the offensive, the daytime bombers were to make heavy strikes against the enemy artillery ahead of the Magnuszew and Pulawsk bridgeheads. Then they were to operate against objectives indicated by the commanders of the combined-arms armies as well as against the enemy reserves, road junctions and crossings.

The AA assault planes for the first 3 hours were to make wave attacks against the previously assigned targets to aid the troops in breaking through the enemy defense. Then the shad were to be put under operational subordination to the commanders of the combined-arms armies and aid in developing the success in the breakthrough of the defenses and the advance of the troops into the tactical depth of the enemy defenses. With the committing of the tank armies to the breakthrough, the assault air formations would be moved under their commanders.

Thus, during the first 3 hours of the offensive, the control of all aviation was to be centralized in the hands of the AA commander. With the putting of the assault planes under operational subordination of the army commanders, the AA was left solely with coordinating their actions and had the right of giving them new missions. In the following days of the offensive, the assault planes were also to be used for actions against the enemy reserves and rail communications.

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A reliable cover for our troops against air strikes and the ensuring of the actions of the bombers and assault planes were to be achieved by sealing off the enemy airfields, by the action of the fighters from the 3d Iak and the 283d Iad against enemy aviation on the approaches to the bridgeheads, and by destroying enemy aircraft deep in enemy territory. Particular attention was to be given to covering the crossings and the tank armies.

The overall effort for the 16th AA as envisaged by the decision was: 3,625 sorties over the 5-6 days before the start of the offensive, 7,942 for the first day of the operation, and 5,420 sorties for the second.

The decision of the AA commander was expressed in the form of a plan for the combat use of aviation for the first 4 days of the offensive. The missions for the commanders of the air formations were issued 7 days prior to the start of the offensive personally by the army commander.

The concentration of aviation because of secrecy considerations was carried out 2-3 days before the start of the offensive in observing signals security and deception.

By the start of the offensive, the AA fighters had been rebased to airfields which were 10-20 km away from the front line, for the assault planes they were 20-30 km away, for the daytime bombers up to 70 km, and for the night bombers up to 20 km.

On the eve of the offensive the troops were issued an appeal from the military council of the front. In addition the command of the 16th AA sent out to all the air units the following letter to the personnel:

"Comrade fliers! We are going into the last and decisive battle! We have been entrusted with an extremely responsible mission as the most mobile and strongest branch of forces. Comrades, hit the enemy with all boldness, valor and harshness. Do not allow him to either move or breathe either in the air or on the ground. Under your strikes enemy artillery should fall silent, the roads should be frozen, and the reserves should be held down and destroyed. By your feats raise the glory of Soviet aviation even higher. Forward for our motherland!"<sup>1</sup>

With the receiving of the appeals, meetings arose in the air units under unfurled colors. The commanders and political workers, the fliers and mechanics spoke with great enthusiasm. After this all the personnel, on bended knee, gave a solemn oath to carry out their patriotic duty to the fatherland honorably.

<sup>1</sup> Arkhiv MO SSSR, folio 368, inv. 6476, file 521, sheet 29.

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At a meeting in the 128th bap, the sister of the Komsomol Jr Lt Ivan Pashko who had died a death of the brave spoke. She said: "Shoulder to shoulder with many of you my brother fought for the freedom of our motherland. An enemy bullet took away his young life. Beat the German monsters even harder for the death of my brother and for your military friends, for the rivers of shed Russian blood and for the tears of our women and children. I am sure that you will carry the Red Banner of Victory to Berlin on the wings of your aircraft."<sup>1</sup>

As a result of the organizational and political measures carried out, all the units of the 16th AA began operations with a high patriotic upsurge.

Several days before the start of the offensive, from reconnaissance data it was learned that the enemy in the region of the bridgeheads had pulled back the infantry from the first trenches and a portion of the artillery into the defensive depth. Due to the extremely difficult weather conditions, it was impossible to verify this information by air reconnaissance. However, on 13 January, that is, one day before the start of the operation, the scout from the 16th odrap Sr Lt G. Ye. Kul'manov, in making a flight on a Yak-9 aircraft, visually from a low-level flight discovered that in certain positions the enemy had set up dummy weapons. Soon thereafter the pulling back of the troops was affirmed by scouts from the shad.

The air reconnaissance data together with other information and the weather conditions were taken into account. Instead of heavy artillery softening up, there was to be an artillery strike, after which instead of an attack by the main forces an offensive was to be commenced by the forward battalions supported by a moving barrage.

In the Vistula-Oder Operation

The offensive by the troops of the First Belorussian Front in the Vistula-Oder Operation commenced on 14 January 1945, 6 days ahead of the time planned by Headquarters at the request of the Allies the troops of which were confronted with a catastrophe as a result of the German breakthrough in the Ardennes.

The 16th AA commenced operations at 0700 hours. Single night bombers from the 242d nbad attacked enemy staffs and communications centers. Before this airplanes from the 9th Guards nbad conducted reconnaissance with accompanying bombing. Due to the dense fog the night bombers made only 42 sorties. However they succeeded in bombing the staff of the 56th Fascist Tank Corps and disrupting troop control for a certain time.

At 0830 hours the troops on the front at the Magnuszew and Pulawsk bridgeheads after a 25-minute artillery attack rose to the attack in a dense fog, and this to a certain degree concealed their actions and made it possible to successfully take the forward enemy defensive positions and develop a further offensive.

<sup>1</sup> Arkhiv MO SSSR, folio 368, inv. 6476, file 555, sheet 70.



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The formations of assault planes, fighters and bombers at this time were on the alert, but they were unable to begin the planned air softening up process and troop support. The fog had descended to the ground and covered the airfields and the targets making it difficult for even the light PO-2 airplanes to fly.

The difficulty of the weather conditions can be judged from the following episode. The crew of the 717th nbad consisting of Jr Sgts V. A. Malyshev and A. A. Kovtun in returning from reconnaissance were unable to spot their own airfield in the region of Ryki in the dense fog. In trying to land blind the aircraft struck a church steeple and was caught hanging on it. It was only by good luck that the crew remained alive. The fliers received contusions and were removed with the help of our soldiers and local inhabitants.

For the purpose of supporting the ground forces, the commander of the 16th AA permitted the commanders of the air formations, regardless of the extremely bad weather conditions, to let the most experienced crews carry out missions. Attacks were permitted only against those targets which would be indicated by the command of the combined-arms armies, and this increased the effectiveness of using aviation and excluded the possibility of hitting our own troops. In the second half of the day, the 221st bad, the 9th shak and the 11th Guards shad made 55 sorties to bomb and srafe the enemy troops, but because of the fog some crews were unable to carry out the missions. The remaining air formations did not take off. The bad weather conditions were the cause of the loss of six aircraft.

During the day enemy aircraft did not appear.

By evening the troops of the front had broken through the main enemy defensive zone on both bridgeheads and had advanced 12-18 km in depth, while the 11th Tank Corps had begun the battle for Radom.

At dawn on 15 January the troops of the front continued the offensive. On the Magnuszew bridgehead, the 1st Guards Tank Army was thrown into the breach. The enemy, in putting up stubborn resistance, under the attacks by the troops of the front retreated in a westerly and northwesterly direction.

Due to the bad weather (a solid cloud over 50-200 meters high, fog and snow), the AA only in the second half of the day began operations with the most experienced crews.

In supporting mainly the troops of the 61st and 5th assault armies, the small groups of assault planes attacked enemy artillery, tanks and personnel. The fighters carried out "free hunting" and air reconnaissance. Regardless of the bad weather conditions, the fliers having previously studied the area of operations and the formation of enemy defenses, were able to find the necessary objectives from scarcely noticeable features and make accurate attacks against them.

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Thus, four assault planes from the 805th shap under the command of the regimental navigator Sr Lt I. A. Sukhorukov (in May 1946, he became a Hero of the Soviet Union, having made 80 combat sorties by the end of the war) near the point of Warka detected around 20 enemy tanks and over 2 infantry battalions deployed in battle formation for a counterattack against the flank of our troops. Sukhorukov reported this to the command post of the 5th Assault Army to his corps commander, Gen B. K. Tokarev. Then, having reformed the group in a circle, he attacked the enemy tanks. After the first pass several fascist tanks were set afire by the dropped antitank bombs, while the enemy infantry took cover. The assault planes, in endeavoring to check the enemy and cause it greater losses, made seven passes, after which they were relieved by other groups which had been summoned by the commander of the 6th shak. They completed the defeat of the enemy and supported the advance of our troops.

The commander of the 16th AA sent the following telegram to the commander of the 6th shak: "The assault planes made an effective strike against the enemy ahead of the front of the 5th Assault Army, and as a result of this the units advanced successfully. May I state our thanks to all the flight and technical personnel participating in the operations."

The troops of the 61st Army encountered heavy enemy fire resistance from the region of Nowo Zelechow. For aiding the troops, six assault planes from the 58th Guards shap took off headed by regimental commander, Hero of the Soviet Union Lt Col V. D. Panfilov. As a result of their attacks, the enemy firing positions were neutralized, the troops went over to the attack and captured the points of Nowo Zelechow and Podguzice.

Good actions were carried out by groups of Guards assault planes led by the pilots A. M. Zhgulev, A. S. Zinchenko, Hero of the Soviet Union V. F. Khokhlachev, as well as Bogdanov, Milyukov and Tvauri (later A. S. Bogdanov, V. A. Milyukov and G. I. Tvauri were awarded the titles of Hero of the Soviet Union).

By the end of the day, the air scouts had established that the Pionki--Radom road was clogged with troops, motor vehicles and wagons moving west. These data showed the beginning of the pullback of the basic grouping of enemy troops.

The 16th AA on 15 January made 181 sorties, including 81 to strafe the enemy; the remainder were for reconnaissance, "free hunting" and escorting assault planes.

Only four overflights by enemy aircraft were noted over the troops of the front.

On 16 January the troops of the front continued to develop the offensive, particularly successfully on the left wing of the front. From the Magnuszew bridgehead, the 2d Guards Tank Army was flown into the breach and by the end of the day it had approached Sochaczew, having enveloped the Warsaw German grouping from the southwest.

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The 9th Guards and the 242d nbad, in benefiting from the improved weather, began nighttime operations. By solitary aircraft they attacked the retreating Nazi troops and carried out reconnaissance, having made 223 sorties.

At dawn the 16th AA began operations at full strength. Its basic efforts were focused on supporting the tank armies and pursuing the retreating enemy troops.

In the morning the reconnaissance crews spotted the movement of enemy columns from Gura Kalwaria and Warsaw to the west. Fearing encirclement in the area of Warsaw, the enemy had begun to pull back its troops. From 1017 hours over 12,000 motor vehicles, up to 140 tanks, 240 guns and 3,500 wagons were moving along the roads from Nowa Miasto, Radom and Wierzbica to the west.

The air scouts detected the direction and scale of the retreat of the main German grouping in the zone of the offensive by the troops of the front. This provided an opportunity for the command to correctly allocate the forces and to organize attacks against the retreating enemy columns. Here the assault planes played a very important role. As a result of their strikes piles of destroyed enemy equipment clogged the roads, the columns halted and favorable conditions were created for the actions of the tank formations.

Thus, the 9th shak and the 11th Guards shad along with fighters from the 13th iak and the 286th iad supported the offensive of the troops from the 33d and 69th armies and their tank corps. Seven blockages were created by assault plane attacks on the Pszysucha--Opoczno road during the day. The bridge at Opoczno was destroyed by the assault planes. On the shore a large number of enemy personnel and equipment had accumulated. The efforts of the aviation were focused on destroying this grouping. The enemy suffered great losses from its attacks. More than 3,000 motor vehicles, armored personnel carriers and several score tanks were left on the roads as well as many guns and other military equipment which had been abandoned by the retreating troops. A large number of Nazis was destroyed along with the equipment. Here the 9th shak carried out 252 sorties and the 13th iak made 460. In the region of Minszek, Kraszkow and Dzielna, the assault planes destroyed over a thousand motor vehicles and a large number of enemy personnel and military equipment on the road.

In a section of the Opoczno-Tomaszow road, as a result of actions by our assault planes and bombers, an enemy column consisting of a large number of motor vehicles, guns and wagons was stopped in the forest. This was immediately used by the forward tank units which were moving on Tomaszow. From a march formation they attacked the enemy column and crushed it.

To the west of Nowa Miasto a retreating enemy column came under attack by eight assault planes from the 59th Guards shap under the command of Guards Maj G. G. Klimenko. When the head of the column had entered a defile, the

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assault planes made eight passes and having destroyed many motor vehicles forced the enemy column to stop. Soon the approaching tanks of a forward detachment completed the defeat of this column.

In the region of Bialobrzegi, Nowa Miasto and Sochaczew the enemy troops were effectively attacked by groups of assault planes from the 2d Guards shad under the command of Lt Col V. Ye. Nedel'ko and Hero of the Soviet Union V. D. Panfilov, Maj S. T. Borshchev, N. P. Vasil'chenko, Hero of the Soviet Union V. F. Khokhlachev and Capt M. I. Burkov. In addition to them, Capt S. I. Zhukov, Sr Lts G. S. Kiselev, A. N. Sodorovich and Lt V. A. Tyshevich distinguished themselves (for the successful carrying out of, respectively, 138, 110, 102 and 113 combat sorties for staffing, in 1946 they were awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union).

The AA day bombers, having the mission of preventing the enemy from pulling back to the west, made wave strikes against enemy troop accumulations in the region of Studzianka, Brzoza, Drzewica, Tomaszow, and also bombed the railroad stations of Opoczno, Szimanow, Zyrardow, the bridge at Rawa Mazowiecka and the airfield of Brzostow. In the Opoczno area a strike was made by 20 aircraft from the 128th bap (commander Maj M. P. Mizinov and navigator Capt S. S. Shcheglov), by two groups of nine aircraft from the 96th Guards bap (leaders pilots Maj P. P. Subbotin with navigator Capt F. G. Krikunov and Maj A. I. Fadeyev with navigator Capt D. L. Los') and 11 Pe-2 from the 54th bap (commander Lt Col A. S. Khlebnikov, navigator Maj A. P. Logvinov).

When the air scouts had established that the enemy troops were concentrating in the region of Inowlodz, in endeavoring to cross the Pilica River and occupy a prepared defensive line on the northern bank, the AA commander ordered the commanders of the 3d bak and the 221st bad to destroy the enemy troops and equipment in this area. After the bomber attack the bridge at the point of Inowlodz was destroyed, the enemy had abandoned over 500 good motor vehicles on the approaches to it and its troops had begun to retreat to Tomaszew in disorder. Here successful operations were carried out by three groups of nine Pe-2 from the 128th bap (leaders Hero of the Soviet Union Lt Col M. M. Voronkov with the navigator Maj N. D. Lepekhin and Capt A. V. Sarygin with the navigator Capt A. N. Toropov), four groups of six-nine aircraft from the 779th bap (leaders Lt Col A. V. Khramchenkov with navigator Maj A. S. Simonov, Maj P. N. Ksyunin with the navigator Capt N. K. Pashkovskiy, and Capt B. M. Mamikhin with navigator Capt G. T. Sidorov), and one group of nine from the 24th bap (commander Lt Col A. I. Sokolov and navigator Maj G. D. Turayev).

The 3d bak, the 183d and 221st bad during the day made 587 bombing sorties. As a result of the successful raids, traffic on the railroad sections of Skierniewice-Tomaszow and Opoczno-Lodz was halted.

During the pursuit of the Nazi troops, air reconnaissance assumed particular significance. The scouts detected the direction of the retreat of the enemy columns and aided the mobile troops in defeating the enemy.

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During the day of 16 January the scouts of the 6th iak established the retreat of fascist troops from the region of Warsaw to Sochaczew. Having obtained these data, the commander of the 2d Guards Tank Army accelerated the advance of the forward detachments and cut off the enemy's escape route. On the Warsaw-Sochaczew road, up to 5,000 motor vehicles piled up. The bombers, assault planes and fighters made a series of crushing strikes against the halted columns. The German command then endeavored to direct the flow of retreating troops to the northwest, to Wyszogrod, but by this time the bridge over the Vistula had already been damaged by our aviation. The enemy, compressed on all sides in this area, suffered great losses and was crushed.

The 6th shak cooperated with the 2d Guards Tank Army, and during the day the assault planes carried out 272 sorties. The 1st Guards Tank Army was supported by the 2d and 11th Guards shad. They made 345 sorties.

The fighters, in escorting the assault planes and in carrying out "free hunting" in those instances when there was no enemy aviation in the air, also attacked the retreating enemy columns. Thus, fliers from the 3d iak by strafing destroyed and damaged 2 aircraft at the Dombrowo airfield, 143 motor vehicles on roads, 8 locomotives and 17 cars, and put a large number of Nazi soldiers out of action.

In carrying out the missions the actions of the AA fliers were marked, as before, by courage and valor. The flier from the 805th shap Lt A. F. Konyakhin on this day made a heroic feat in assisting his commander in combat. During a strafing attack on Skierniewice station, the aircraft of Lt V. G. Khukhlin was hit by enemy antiaircraft artillery. The flier made a forced landing in the region of the station. Communist Konyakhin decided to rescue his flight commander and his gunner A. M. Sharkov. Having made several circles over the place of their landing and having fired the machine guns at the approaching Nazis, he landed on a limited area next to the shot-up aircraft and took Khukhlin's crew into his cockpit. Before the very eyes of the fascists he took off and landed safely at his airfield.

On this day the troops of the 69th Army together with the 11th Tank Corps stormed the town of Radom. When the sun rose the assault planes of the 9th shak under the cover of fighters from the 13th iak provided effective support for the troops. They blazed the trail for the tanks, destroying enemy artillery and assault guns using instructions from the ground. At the same time from the air reconnaissance data the assault planes were directed to the columns of retreating enemy troops. By their heavy strikes they stopped the movement of the columns and the tank units which had hurried up completed their annihilation.

From the evidence of the commander of the 65th Tank Brigade Col A. V. Luk'-yanov, five groups of six Il-2 from the 3d Guards shad summoned to the battlefield by their commander Col A. A. Smirnov attacked and routed an enemy column retreating along the Wolianow-Mniszek road. The enemy lost 12 tanks, 4 6-barrel mortars, around 200 motor vehicles and hundreds of killed soldiers and officers.

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On the evening of 16 January, the capital of our motherland, Moscow, saluted the troops of the First Belorussian Front, including the fliers from the air formations of Maj Gens Avn Krupskiy and Sidnev, Cols Smirnov, Kovalev, Mironov and Chirva who distinguished themselves in the capturing of the town of Radom. The honorary name of Radom was given to the 71th Guards and 724th shap, the 116th Guards and 347th iap (commanders Lt Cols A. I. Sevast'yanov, P. P. Volodin, V. I. Nenashev and P. B. Dankevich).

As a total of the third day of the offensive, the 16th AA, in benefiting from good weather conditions, carried out 3,431 sorties, the largest number of sorties in the operation. Here 1,481 sorties were made for bombing and strafing enemy troops, and 352 were for reconnaissance.

In the 24 air battles, 18 fascist aircraft were shot down. Particularly distinguishing themselves were the fliers of the 176th Guards iap twice Hero of the Soviet Union Maj I. N. Kozhedub, Sr Lt N. S. Rudenko and Lt A. F. Vas'ko (they subsequently were both awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union; to the score of each of them were 200-300 combat sorties and 15-20 victories in the air); the fliers of the 265th iad Capt V. A. Yegorovich and Lt S. P. Shpunyakov (both had, respectively, 248 and 335 combat sorties, they had shot down 22 and 15 enemy aircraft and had become Heroes of the Soviet Union); the fliers of the 234th iad Hero of the Soviet Union Capt V. N. Yashin, Lts N. A. Brodskiy and N. I. Fedorov; Sr Lt A. I. Larin and Lt N. Ya. Blizhin of the 273d iad; Maj I. G. Vikhlyayev of the 282d iad and Lts V. P. Listoforov, M. S. Martynov and B. A. Potemkin of the 283d iad.

The rapid actions of the mobile troops and the active support from the air formations on 16 January led to the defeat of numerous columns of Nazi invaders and turned their retreat into panic flight.

As before air superiority remained with Soviet aviation. However, the enemy antiaircraft artillery put up very strong resistance, and the AA lost 29 aircraft from its fire.

During the night of 17 January, the 1st Polish Army went over to the offensive. Having crossed the Vistula, in the morning with the support of the 4th Polish Mixed Air Division under the command of Col A. S. Romeyko entered the capital of Poland. Simultaneously Soviet troops entered Warsaw. In other sectors the formations of the First Belorussian Front continued to pursue the enemy, in surrounding and destroying its individual groupings.

In aiding the troops of the front in developing the success, during the night individual Po-2 aircraft from the AA bombed the enemy troops retreating from Warsaw to the west and northwest, and the troop concentration in the area of Tomaszow, and carried out reconnaissance. The 9th Guards and 242d nbad made 220 sorties.

The evening before the air scouts had established that enemy trains were moving continuously to the west through Lodz. The traffic had to be stopped through this junction and the retreat of the enemy troops prevented. The commander of the 16th AA ordered the bombers to destroy the major bridges

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and crossings on the enemy escape routes, as well as knock out the basic railroad stations.

In carrying out the given missions, on 17 January the bombers had destroyed the following: the bridges over the Vistula and Wyszogrod, over the Ochnia River at Kutno and the trains at the West Lodz Station by the 241st bad; the bridge over the Warta at Sieradz and the East Lodz Railroad Station by the 301st bad.

In bombing the railroad bridge at Sieradz, five Pe-2 of squadron commander of the 96th Guards bap Capt V. P. Mel'nik with the navigator Sr Lt P. A. Kislitsin and the gunner-radio operator Sr Lt Ya. I. Goncharov distinguished themselves. In diving one after another, the pilots dropped 22 high explosive bombs with a caliber of 250-100 kg on the bridge. The bridge was heavily damaged by the direct hits, and traffic over it was stopped. As a result our troops captured a significant number of rolling stock.

The highway over the Rawka River at Rawa Mozawiecka was destroyed by nine Pe-2 led by the squadron commander of the 54th bap Maj N. I. Kutsiy. Much motor transport and many enemy troops accumulated in front of the destroyed crossing on the eastern edge of the town, and the enemy was bombed and strafed by several groups from the 24 Guards shad.

The East Lodz Station was as effectively bombed by nine divebombers led by the commander of the 301st bad, Col F. M. Fedorenko with the division navigator Maj I. Ye. Yakubovich. The leader of the second group of nine was the squadron commander from the 96th Guards bap Maj A. P. Smirnov with the navigator Capt A. A. Tsaregorodskiy. The attack on the station was made at a time when up to 10 trains with locomotives with their steam up were there.

After them the station was attacked from a horizontal flight by three groups of six-nine aircraft from the 54th bap. The leaders were regimental commander Lt Col A. S. Khlebnikov, Maj G. S. Karabutov and N. I. Kutsiy with navigators Maj A. P. Logvinov and Sr Lts V. P. Zhitnik and A. S. Shutov. As a total 9 tracks, 1 antiaircraft battery, 2 guns mounted on a flatcar, 66 railroad cars and 2 steam engines were destroyed and many soldiers and officers were put out of action.

At this time West Lodz Station was attacked by divebombing and horizontal bombing by two groups of 10 aircraft from the 128th bap led by Capt A. V. Sarygin and Sr Lt I. A. Malikov, and two groups of nine from the 779th bap where the leaders were regimental commander Lt Col A. V. Khrumchenkov with navigator Maj A. G. Simonov and Capt E. M. Mamikhin with navigator Capt G. T. Sidorov. At the station 3 railroad tracks were destroyed, an ammunition stack and a large number of railroad cars and fuel tank cars were blown up, and a large number of enemy personnel were destroyed.

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After bombing the Lodz railroad junction ceased operating. The bombers attacked Pobianice Station with equal success, and here the tracks were destroyed and several freight cars and flat cars were destroyed. Eight trains were left at the station with freight and various equipment and these were captured by the troops of the front.

The 221st bad bombed a concentration of motor transport on the Piotrkow-Lask road, having made 74 sorties.

On that day the air reconnaissance traced the direction of the movement of the enemy columns. Under the leadership of Maj A. A. Yashkin (6th shak), the air scouts established that the remnants of the enemy grouping moving on Sochaczew, because of the capturing of the basic Warsaw-Kutno mainline by our tank troops in the region of Blonie, had changed direction to the northwest and were retreating in disorder to the ice crossing over the Vistula at Wyszogrod.

Having discovered the enemy's intentions, the AA commander ordered the 183d bad to break up the ice in the area of Wolka Pszybowska-Wyszogrod and not allow the enemy troops to cross to the northern bank of the Vistula. Four groups of Pe-2 (32 aircraft, under a fighter cover took off for breaking up the ice. The bombers dropped the bombs on the ice from altitudes of 1,400-1,650 meters from a horizontal flight. The bomber groups were led by the deputy regimental commander Lt Col A. V. Fadeyev and the squadron commanders Capt G. I. Nikitin, Sr Lt F. V. Shelukhin and Lt Slitkov. The crossings were destroyed and the ice became unsuitable for the crossing of even small infantry groups. Many enemy troops and military equipment accumulated in the area of Wyszogrod. Soon thereafter our bombers and assault planes made several strikes on them.

At this time assault planes from the 6th shak attacked the fascist troops which were retreating from Blonie. Thus, nine Il-2 from the 805th shap under the command of Sr Lt I. A. Sukhorukov and escorted by six Yak-3 attacked an enemy column of 200 motor vehicles and tanks retreating along the Blonie-Paprotnia road. The assault planes made 13 passes; the IIs descended to a low-altitude flight and fired on the Nazi invaders at pointblank range. The cover fighters also fought along with the assault planes. The motor column was crushed.

Gen Arm A. I. Radziyevskiy (during the war years he was chief of staff of the 2d Guards Tank Army and is now the chief of the Military Academy and is now the chief of the Military Academy imeni M. V. Frunze) in the book "9 Maya 1945 g." [9 May 1945] has written:

"I would like to say a good word about the action of the fliers from the 6th shak. They made a strong attack against enemy columns which were extended along the highway and broke them up. The Nazi troops were endeavoring to make their way through the forests to the north beyond the Vistula River. The aviation destroyed the bridges, and large accumulations of enemy troops formed around the crossings and the troops were destroyed by the assault planes and bombers from the 16th AA."



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Equally successful operations were carried out by 14 assault planes from the 175th Guards shap led by Hero of the Soviet Union Maj D. I. Smirnov. On the Gielniow-Opoczno highway he detected a column of up to 400 motor vehicles moving in two lines and he decided to attack it. His subgroup would attack the head of the column, a second subgroup under Sr Lt I. F. Fateyev would strike the center, and a third under Lt P. S. Dokuchalov would hit the tail. After the first pass Maj Smirnov reformed the group into a general circle and gave the command for the fliers to select a target independently. The assault planes made seven passes and in each of them, three-four attacks. The cover fighters of the 286th iad, having encountered no enemy in the air, also strafed the column with cannon and machine gun fire. A larger portion of the enemy motor vehicles and personnel was put out of action. The guardsmen fliers Fateyev and Dokuchalov in May 1946 were awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. By the end of the war each of them had made 115-120 successful attacks on enemy troops.

On this day effective actions were carried out by the groups of the commander of the 173d Guards shap Hero of the Soviet Union Lt Col N. K. Lysenko and Lt B. N. Sazykin.

Good results were also achieved by the assault planes from the 2d Guards shad, where groups were led by Heroes of the Soviet Union Lt Cols V. D. Panfilov and M. G. Sklyarov and Maj V. F. Kokhlachev, as well as Majs N. P. Vasil'chenko and A. I. Zavrazhnov, Capts A. P. Gusev and A. G. Ivaykin, Sr Lts A. S. Bogdanov, S. I. Zhukov, G. I. Tvauri and V. A. Tyshevich, Lts B. D. Nikitenko, S. T. Oniskevich and V. A. Medvedev (by the end of the war he had over 100 combat sorties, he had destroyed a large number of enemy military equipment, and in May 1946 was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union).

Six Il-2 from the 33d Guards shap under the command of Hero of the Soviet Union Capt N. I. Belavin carried out their mission excellently. Having discovered a column of motor vehicles on the Studzianka-Opoczno highway, the assault planes from altitudes from 1,000 meters to a roof-top flight in several passes attacked it and halted the traffic. The units of the 9th Tank Corps which hurried up made use of this. They completed the rout of the column. The Nazis abandoned up to 2,500 motor vehicles on the road.

According to data from the staff of the 9th Tank Corps, the 300th shad and the 283d iad which were cooperating with it during 16 and 17 January destroyed up to 3,000 enemy vehicles and tanks on the roads.

The rapid advance of the tank formations which moved 30-50 km and more ahead of the combined-arms armies of the front required special circumspection from our fliers. In order to exclude the possibility of attacking our own troops, the AA commander sent out the following telegram to the commanders of the air formations: "In no instance should ground targets be attacked until the flight personnel is certain that this is the enemy. The signals of our troops must be carefully followed." The assault planes began to assign an element of crews in the group which in dubious instances would descend to a roof-top flight and having established which side the troops were on, began the attack

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on the target, giving the signal to the remaining crews. Such a procedure provided a reliable guarantee against any mistakes by the assault planes.

On 17 January, assault actions were actively carried out also by the fighter units. Some 147 fighters took off with bombs. Fighters from the 3d and 6th iak during the day destroyed and damaged around 300 motor vehicles and much other military equipment. Groups from the 176th Guards iap led by Hero of the Soviet Union Capt O. S. Belikov and Sr Lt N. S. Rudenko, in carrying out "free hunting," attacked Lowicz airfield and destroyed six enemy aircraft.

Enemy aviation was not active, possibly because of the loss of a number of airfields.

The 16th AA on 17 January made 2,784 sorties (including 220 at night), with 1,256 for bombing and strafing enemy troops. In five air battles, four fascist aircraft were shot down. The army lost 11 aircraft basically from antiaircraft fire.

In the evening, in commemoration of the liberation of Warsaw, Moscow saluted the formations of the First Belorussian Front and the units of the 1st Polish Army. The order of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief stated that in the battles to capture the capital of allied Poland, along with the troops the fliers of Col Gen Avn Rudenko, Lt Gens Avn Bryko and Savitskiy, Maj Gens Avn Karavatskiy, Tokarev and Komarov, Cols Timofeyev, Belousov, Sukhoryabov, Rasskazov, Sitkin, Buzylev, Berkal', Ivanov and Romeyko, Lt Cols Nakonchnikov, Sherstyuk and Gavil'chenko had distinguished themselves.

The honorary name of Warsaw was awarded to the most distinguished 198th shad (commander Hero of the Soviet Union Col V. I. Belousov), the 765th shap, the 45th Guards nbap, the 127th and 165th iap (commanders Lt Cols V. G. Zanozdra, A. A. Menyayev, V. V. Puzeykin and N. V. Semenov). All the AA aviators who participated in these battles subsequently were awarded the medal "For the Liberation of Warsaw."

As a total in the 4-day battles for the liberation of Warsaw, the 16th AA carried out 6,493 combat sorties. In addition, the 4th Polish sad made about 400 sorties.

The rapid advance of the troops of the front to the west required the rapid construction of new airfields and the rebasing of the air units behind the troops. By 16 January the AA commander had given the corresponding disposition to certain air formations.

And then, as soon as the forward units of the 2d Guards Tank Army reached the region of Sochaczew and began shelling the operating enemy airfield, fighters of the 402d iap headed by the commander of the 3d iak Gen Savitskiy were already taking off for there. Having carefully inspected and fired on the airfield, a unit of fighters landed at it, while another covered them from the air by firing; then the remaining fighters landed. Battle

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against the Nazis was still going on around the airfield, but at the flight field the engineer units of the tank army were already helping the aviators fill in the pits and craters. Soon the air transports began moving in technical personnel and equipment. By the end of the day the rebasing of the air regiment was complete and it began to cover the tank army. All of this occurred in the enemy rear. On the western edge of the airfield, the tank units continued to rout the enemy motorized infantry. Several hours later the assault planes were also rebased to Sochaczew airfield. A tank battalion was assigned to defend the airfield.

Gen Arm A. I. Radziyevskiy on this question recalled that the aviation was rebased to airfields which had been captured by the tank formations before the arrival of the combined-arms armies. The 265th iad under the command of Col. A. A. Koryagin in this manner was rebased to airfields in Sochaczew, Lubien and Inowroclaw. The tank troops praised the courage of the pilots and technicians of the 16th AA who in disregarding the danger did everything to provide cover for the tank formations from the air.

With the start of the operation, the party political apparatus of the AA continued constant work to maintain the high offensive drive of all the personnel. In the air units basic attention was concentrated on the execution of orders from commanders by the personnel, at summing up the results of operations for the day, and at popularizing the actions of outstanding fliers and navigators in combat. The names of the leading aviators did not leave the pages of the combat leaflets and express bulletins.

In the visual agitation, special posterboards were used with the sections: "Distinguishing Themselves Today in Combat Were...", "The Results of the Combat Day," and so forth where the combat deeds of the flight and technical personnel were described. Thus the results of the successful bombing of the railroad bridge at Sieradz by the group of Capt V. P. Mel'nik was immediately made known to all the flight personnel of the 96th Guards bap. In the regiment a leaflet was put out under the name "Order of the Motherland Fulfilled" and here this feat was described in detail.

A combat leaflet by the squadron of the 812th iap described in detail how Lt N. V. Lopatin had emerged the winner from an unequal air battle. After this many fliers stated that they would follow the example of Lopatin. A combat leaflet of a squadron from the 15th iap described the excellent work of the air mechanics P. F. Vanguyev and K. A. Sushko the aircraft of whom had flown over 100 hours without failures and breakdowns. The experience of these mechanics was mentioned at a meeting of the technical personnel and this served as an example for others.

In the course of the operation the express leaflets were widely used. They were made up very quickly, and often the flier had scarcely landed after an air combat and the express leaflet described his successes which had been heard by radio. Thus, on 16 January, Capt D. N. Ashchaulov and Lt I. D. Radchikov of the 402d iap were victorious in an air battle. The fliers had not yet taxied up to the parking area when in a prominent place a leaflet was already up which stated: "Glory to the courageous fliers Ashchaulov and Radchikov who each shot down one enemy aircraft!"

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At the meetings of the party and Komsomol organizations held in the breaks between battles they discussed the most urgent questions in the life of the AA aviators. As before, the agitators carried out great political work. They acquainted the personnel of the subunits with the summaries of Sovinformbyuro and they described the labor heroism of the Soviet people in the rear as well as comrades who had distinguished themselves.

In the course of the battles the aviators joined the Communist Party. During the operation the party organization of the AA was increased by 595 party members and 526 candidate members. Of those accepted into the party, 211 were pilots and 298 were technicians and drivers. The presenting of party documents was carried out directly before a combat sortie at the airfields and no later than 3-5 days after admission. Belonging to the Communist Party strengthened the courage of the air fighters.

The pilot of the 24th bap Jr Lt I. Ya. Chernyy in his application wrote: "I wish to be admitted as a member of the VKP(b). I want to get the fascist beast in his own lair as a member of the Bolshevik party. In its ranks I will fight unceasingly against the enemy in sparing neither forces nor life." Chernyy excellently carried out his combat missions and was awarded the Order of the Red Banner for 35 successful combat sorties.

On 18 January, the troops of the front, in overcoming the fire resistance in individual areas and in repelling counterattacks, continued to pursue the retreating Nazi occupiers. The air formations of the 16th AA during the night had been unable to sortie because of the bad weather, and during the day limited operations were carried out.

In the morning, the 6th shak and the 2d Guards shad, in supporting the mobile formations of the front, destroyed the enemy troops retreating along the roads to Plock and Kutno. As a total they made 99 sorties. Assault planes from the 9th shak attacked enemy columns on the roads to the west of Piotrkow and along the railroads, having made 120 sorties.

On this day the fliers of the 3d Guards shad particularly distinguished themselves. An element of assault plane scouts headed by Hero of the Soviet Union Capt F. B. Bublikov detected a large number of railroad trains moving toward Lodz in the area of Andrzejewo and Rozce. Some 19 crews headed by the commander of the 70th Guards shap Lt Col A. I. Kuz'min took off to destroy them. The first attack was made from an altitude of 600 meters to a rooftop flight against the head trains and above all against the locomotives, and then on Andrzejewo and Galkowek stations. The bombs and rockets set four trains with military equipment and ammunition on fire. The fires and explosions lasted more than a day. Around 30 trains with military freight piled up in front of the stations. They all became captured material for our troops.

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With the improvement in the weather during the second half of the day, the 3d iak with six groups and the 221st bad with four groups bombed the railroad stations of Dobrzyn, Pabianice and Lask and the troop accumulations at these points. As a total they made 86 sorties.

Very effective was the attack against Pabianice Station by eight Pe-2 from the 241st bad under the command of the commander of the 24th bap Lt Col A. I. Sokolov with the regimental navigator Maj G. D. Turayev. At the moment of the attack 8 trains were at the station. The bombers destroyed 10 tracks and wiped out 2 steam locomotives, a large number of freight cars and flat cars with military equipment and ammunition.

During this time Dobrzyn Station was successfully bombed by eight Pe-2 from the 24th bap led by the pilot Maj R. S. Suleymanov and the navigator Sr Lt V. N. Musatov, Lask Station was bombed by six planes from the same regiment under the command of Capt K. A. Molodtsov with the navigator Capt S. Ye. Khryapenkov and two groups of thirteen Pe-2 from the 779th bap led by Maj P. N. Ksyunin and Capt B. M. Mamikhin with navigators Capts N. K. Pashkovskiy and G. T. Siforov. As a result of the bombing, traffic was halted for several days.

The fliers of the 3d iak covered the battle formations of the troops on the front and at the same time strafed the retreating enemy columns and the airfields of Kompina and Lowicz where they destroyed six aircraft.

As in the preceding days enemy aviation was not active.

The AA on 18 January made 674 sorties, including 220 for bombing and strafing the enemy troops.

On this day the 24-year-old communist assistant commander of the 618th shap for the gunnery service Sr Lt V. V. Shishkin and the Komsomol member and gunner MSgt A. V. Khrenov showed exceptional loyalty to their motherland, courage and heroism. In carrying out reconnaissance their Il-2 aircraft was hit by antiaircraft artillery at Wyszogrod. They had to land on enemy-occupied territory. The Germans began to run up to the aircraft. The crew of the reconnaissance assault plane, not wishing to be captured, opened fire at the enemy soldiers using machine guns and then from their personal weapons, killing more than 50 Nazis. In the unequal battle gunner Khrenov was killed and pilot Shishkin was severely wounded. After the liberation of this territory by the troops of the front, the pilot and gunner were found by their aircraft by the inhabitants of the Polish village of Witkowiczi. They told how the fascist monsters cruelly tortured the Soviet flier Valentin Vasil'yevich Shishkin. The torturers cut 5-pointed stars on his body, they cut off his tongue and gouged out his eyes. The patriot of our motherland accepted the torturous death but did not surrender to the enemies. The inhabitants of the village of Witkowiczi transported the bodies of the heroes to their village and buried them there.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Arkhiv MO SSSR, folio of the 197th shad, inv. 259701, file 1, sheet 5; folio of the 6th shak, inv. 193927, file 1, sheet 38.

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The courageous Soviet patriots V. V. Shishkin and A. V. Khrenov posthumously were awarded the Order of the Patriotic War.

On 19 January the air formations of the AA as before were confronted with the missions of air pursuit of the retreating enemy and aiding the troops of the front in developing the offensive. The bad weather conditions impeded operations of the night bombers; they made only 15 sorties.

The unsuccessful attempt of the enemy troops to cross at Wyszogrod forced them to retreat along the Vistula to the crossings at Plock, Wloclawek and Torun. The air scouts detected these movements, and the commander of the 16th AA ordered the 3d bak to destroy the crossings in order not to permit the enemy to retreat.

In the middle of the day, nine groups of Pe-2 from the 3d bak under fighter cover of the 1st Guards iad divebombed the bridges over the Vistula at Plock (26 airplanes), Wloclawek (12 airplanes) and Torun (15 airplanes) from altitudes of 2,400-1,300 meters. Regardless of the strong resistance of enemy antiaircraft gunners and fighters, by direct bomb hits the highway and railroad bridges at Plock were destroyed and traffic over them was halted, the other bridges were damaged.

Particularly effective were the actions of three groups from the 128th bap led by Hero of the Soviet Union, regimental commander Lt Col M. M. Voronkov and the navigator Capt N. F. Starostin in bombing the railroad bridge at Plock. The leaders of the other two groups were Capt A. V. Sarygin and Sr Lt Yu. V. Khilkov. The fliers recorded three direct hits on the bridge. Ten minutes previously a group consisting of six Pe-2 headed by the commander of the 779th bap Lt Col A. V. Khrumchenkov with the navigator Maj A. G. Simonov destroyed there a highway bridge by a direct hit with a 250-kg bomb.

However this was not without losses. The aircraft of Sr Lt G. N. Kolbasenko was set afire from a direct hit by an antiaircraft shell over the target. A fire broke out also on the aircraft of pilot V. A. Tyapin who was still able to turn and return to his territory. The aircraft of Lt K. V. Tsarev was hit with two antiaircraft shells but the pilot did not leave the formation. Serious damage was also caused to the airplanes of Lts I. A. Tabakov and A. S. Ishchenko. Over Plock enemy fighters shot down the aircraft of flier S. I. Bulanov. Our fighters, in covering the bombers, destroyed two enemy aircraft but themselves lost one pilot.

On this day 64 bombers from the 221st bad under the cover of fighters from the 282d iad flew out to bomb troop accumulations in the region of Kolo. But because of a deterioration of the weather conditions, they were unable to carry out the mission and returned to their airfields.

The air units of the 6th shak in elements carried out air reconnaissance with accompanying bombing. In small groups under fighter cover they strafed enemy troop accumulations in the region of Kolo and on the roads to the west of Lodz, and they also attacked Lubien airfield, where 10 fascist aircraft were destroyed.

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The 9th shak and the 11th Guards shad escorted by fighters bombed and strafed the railroad trains at the stations of Dobrzyn, Lask and Sieradz, as well as retreating fascist troops in the regions of Lask and Pabianice.

The fighter formations of the AA during the day covered the troops and crossings against enemy aviation, they carried out "free hunting" and reconnaissance, they escorted the assault planes and bombers and along the way themselves strafed enemy troops.

The enemy fighters countered our aviation and endeavored to bomb the forward units of the front in the region of Kutno. As their total 76 aircraft were counted in the air. In the air battles the Nazis lost 5 aircraft. Here is how one of these battles occurred.

Gen Ye. Ya. Savitskiy in an element with Lt M. Ye. Pivovarov took off to look for airfields for basing an air corps in the region of Kutno. On the way back they detected a group of FW-190 loaded with bombs flying to the east. The 2 Yaks engaged the 12 Fokker-Wulfs in combat. At this time 4 fighters from the 15th iap arrived to cover the troops. Jr Lt V. A. Kalashnikov, seeing this unequal battle and recognizing the aircraft of the corps commander from the identification marks, immediately came to his aid. By a rapid attack he destroyed one enemy aircraft. At the same time by an attack from above and behind Gen Savitskiy shot down the group leader. The fascist pilots, having lost two aircraft, turned west in a low-level flight in disorder.

The AA on 19 January carried out 943 sorties, including 278 for bombing and strafing the enemy.

On 19 January the troops of the first Belorussian Front captured the towns of Lodz, Kutno, Tomaszow and others. Moscow saluted the valorous troops of the front, including the fliers Col Gen Avn Rudenko, Lt Gens Avn Brayko and Savitskiy, Maj Gens Avn Krupskiy, Sidnev, Tokarev, Dzusov, Tatanashvili, Karavatskiy and Komarov, Cols Smirnov, Kovalev, Mironov, Chirva, Timofeyev, Belousov, Isayev, Koryagin, Ivanov, Berkal', Fedorenko, Fedorov, Buzylev and Sukhoryabov and Lt Cols Nakonechnikov and Tishchenko.

Particularly distinguishing themselves were the 9th shak (commander Gen I. V. Krupskiy), the 8th Guards and 745th bap and the 62d Guards trap of the GVF (commander Lt Col G. I. Popov and Majs I. I. Goncharenko and V. V. Yermakov); they were awarded the honorary name of Lodz. The 300th shad (commander Col T. Ye. Kovalev) received the honorary name of Tomaszow.

On 20 January, the enemy pursued by the troops of the front continued to pull back behind the Warta River. The AA in cooperation with the mobile formations continued to attack the retreating columns, the railroad stations and concentrations of Nazi troops.



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The bad weather conditions with snowfalls and poor visibility limited the operations of our aviation. Only the most experienced crews were sent out to carry out missions.

On the first half of the day the assault planes destroyed enemy railroad trains at the stations of Inowroclaw, Kruszwica, Dembowec, Sieradz, Warto and Macieszewice, troop concentrations in the region of Cielne and columns along the roads of Szadek-Warto and Sieradz-Blaszki.

At the railroad station of Macieszewice, the scouts discovered three trains and a large concentration of troops and military equipment. Four groups of six Il-2 took off to destroy them; the groups were led by the commander of the 58th Guards shap Hero of the Soviet Union Guards Lt Col V. D. Panfilov. The leaders of the remaining three groups were the guardsmen Maj A. F. Kozhevanov, Sr Lt S. I. Zhukov and Jr Lt B. D. Nikitenko. The enemy greeted the assault planes with heavy antiaircraft fire. In maneuvering skillfully and neutralizing the specially assigned enemy antiaircraft crews, the assault planes destroyed 70 cars with military supplies, 2 steam locomotives and over a hundred enemy soldiers.

During the assault on the trains, Lt N. P. Gurin died heroically. His aircraft was hit by an antiaircraft shell and caught fire. Without being able to save the aircraft and the crew, Guardsman Gurin, in sacrificing himself, aimed the burning Il-2 in the midst of the railway cars, causing an explosion of the train.

On this day the flier of the 812th iap Lt A. I. Filipov in a dogfight with enemy fighters in the area of Uniejow, having used up his ammunition, rammed and knocked down a Fokker-Wulf, after which he bailed out.

In the second half of the day, groups of bombers from the 3d bak and assault planes from the 11th Guards shad destroyed artillery in its firing positions and enemy concentrations near Sieradz and Chojna, as well as infantry in the trenches on the western bank of the Warta. This aided the mobile troops in crossing the Warta.

The fighter formations escorted the bombers and assault planes and covered the battle formations of the troops of the front. The scouts in many instances, having detected troops, attacked them.

In the areas of operations our aviation encountered up to 80 enemy aircraft, but only 8 of them were noted over the troops of the front.

On 20 January, the AA carried out 729 sorties, including 116 for bombing and strafing the enemy; 6 fascist aircraft were shot down in air battles.

With the advancement of the troops to the west, the AA units continued to be rebased to new airfields. They were aided by the 9th Guards nbad; during the day it transported cargo and technical personnel to the airfields of Sochaczew and Lubien.

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Gen S. I. Rudenko established personal control over the operation of the rear bodies to seek out and build airfields and demanded that the commanders of the air formations accelerate the rebasing to the forward airfields. For reducing the time required to prepare the airfields liberated by the enemy, one or two bao were attached to each tank army. In addition one motor transport battalion and one airfield engineer battalion were sent into the zones of advance of the combined-arms armies. Each combined-arms or tank army assigned 100-150 men to these battalions for earth moving in building the airfields.

The following example shows how the rebasing of the aviation forward was carried out. On the morning of 22 January, the bao reached the airfields around Poznan which had been abandoned in panic by the Nazis behind the tank troops. A majority of the airplanes abandoned at the airfields had been blown up, because they could not take off because of the bad weather. During the day the forward echelons of three air corps and then all their flight units flew in to the captured airfields and this made it possible to support the subsequent advance of the ground forces from the air. Usually the rebasing was led by the commanders of the air divisions at the new base region.

The command of the AA, the air commanders and staffs in this operation which was marked by great dynamicness gave particular attention to maintaining close coordination with the troops of the front. From the experience of the preceding operations, the commanders of the air formations with operational groups remained at the command posts of the commanders of the combined-arms or tank field forces (formation commanders) having traffic controllers with communications in the forward detachments. This system made it possible not only for the formation commander but also the commander of the forward detachment at any time, in being in contact with the airplanes over the battlefield, to receive immediate help from the air. Sometimes in the course of combat for a short period of time coordination with the troops was disrupted chiefly due to shortcomings in radio communications (in particular, the radios could not operate on the move).

The command of the AA always took the most energetic measures for maintaining steady control of the aviation. Gens S. I. Rudenko and P. I. Brayko constantly followed the situation and made certain that all the air commanders at any time knew where and how the enemy was operating, where our troops were, what missions were being carried out by the subordinate air units, and what their ammunition was. In individual instances the army commander demanded that the commanders of the air formations assign a special squadron which would follow the situation of our troops and report the situation hourly. With the separating of the mobile troops from the main forces and the loss of communications, the air scouts came to their aid by locating them and restoring contact. Continuous air reconnaissance and systematic air observation of the advance of our troops facilitated the control of aviation in such a dynamic operation and supplied the command of the front and the armies with situational data.

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Starting on 21 January, the weather deteriorated sharply and the AA could not carry out any combat sorties.

During the period of 22-28 January, for the same reason combat operations were very limited. The sorties were made chiefly to cover the troops and for air reconnaissance. And on just 24 January under difficult weather conditions the AA made 272 sorties to cover the troops and for reconnaissance with accompanying strafing of the enemy.

On 27 January, the flight and technical personnel of many air formations cleared the snow away from the airfields. Only 85 sorties were made to cover the troops and 30 for air reconnaissance. On this day the crews of the 72d orap showed great courage and skill in conducting air reconnaissance under difficult weather conditions. It had to be established whether the German troops were continuing to retreat toward the Oder, or whether enemy reserves had been brought up to the front in the Poznan-Kustrin sector. Disregarding the solid clouds at an altitude up to 50 meters, the snowfall and flurries, the scouts brilliantly carried out this mission. Particularly distinguishing themselves were the crews of Maj I. Ye. Velikiy, Capt A. D. Stebel'kov, Sr Lt V. F. Gridasov and Lt A. S. Krupenko. In the Pe-2 aircraft, in a snowstorm and with a complete absence of horizontal visibility in certain areas of the route they reconnoitered a full radius in a low-level flight. For excellent execution of the mission under such difficult conditions all the crews immediately after landing, upon the orders of the AA commander, governmental decorations were presented to the reconnaissance chief, the deputy chief of staff of the AA for reconnaissance, Col G. K. Prussakov.

The successful activities of the air scouts would have been impossible without the great work done by the technical personnel of the 72d orap who under the leadership of Engr-Maj F. M. Khomenchuk kept the equipment ready and trouble-free.

Over the period from 22 through 28 January, the AA because of bad weather conditions made only 788 sorties, including 325 to cover the troops and 352 for air reconnaissance. Seven enemy aircraft were shot down in 7 air battles. Victories were won by the fliers of the 15th iap Maj V. I. Suvirov, Sr Lt N. A. Borovskiy, and others.

The troops of the First Belorussian Front, in pursuing the defeated enemy units, in force continued to advance to the Oder and on 28-29 January crossed the German frontier. A portion of the forces of the troops of the front was fighting to destroy the surrounded Poznan garrison.

The AA from the morning of 29 January, due to the extremely bad weather conditions, carried out operations only in small groups of assault planes and fighters. The bomber air divisions did not take to the air. The assault planes of the 6th shank, the 2d and 11th Guards shad in the first half of the day destroyed the enemy in Poznan. Groups of the 58th Guards shap led by Sr Lts A. S. Bogdanov, S. I. Zhukov and Lt A. M. Zhgulev fought well.

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The fighters covered the troops of the front, they escorted the assault planes and along the way strafed the enemy. In five air battles, the fliers of the 15th iap Maj L. N. Slizen', Lt P. N. Gorokhov, Jr Lt I. F. Krivobok and A. I. Pavlikov each shot down one fascist. By the end of the war Maj L. N. Slizen' had to his score 222 combat sorties and 18 shot-down fascist airplanes. For this in May 1947 he was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

At 1300 hours, due to the deterioration of the weather, combat sorties had to be halted. By this time the air formations had made 266 sorties.

During the last days of January, the troops of the front, in reaching the Oder, crossed it without halting and captured bridgeheads in the region of Kustrin.

In assisting the 8th Guards Army in capturing the town of Poznan, during the night of 30 January the 9th Guards nbad and during the day the assault plane formations escorted by fighters bombed and strafed the troops surrounded in the city and destroyed the artillery batteries which had fired on the airfield of Kobylnica. Here excellent actions were carried out by the assault plane pilots under the command of Sr Lt I. F. Fateyev (11th Guards shad), Maj N. P. Vasil'chenko, Capt N. I. Lunev, Lts V. P. Zinenko and G. M. Nesterevich (2d Guards shad).

The fighters covered the battle formations of the troops, they escorted the assault planes, they carried out "free hunting" and by their fire prevented enemy defensive works on the western bank of the Oder. They carried out 18 air battles and shot down 23 fascist aircraft. The heroes of the day were the fliers: Sr Lt V. I. Levko (he shot down two aircraft), Capt G. S. Leont'yev and Jr Lts Mechtanov and Fedoseyev from the 6th iak; Sr Lts V. V. Kablukov and D. I. Suslov from the 3d iak; Lt V. F. Pozdnyakov from the 13th iak and others who each shot down one enemy aircraft.

In the second half of the day, the command of the front received data on a concentration of a German tank army in the region of Landsberg, Kustrin, Furstenberg, Schiebus and Schwerin. This grouping could seriously threaten our troops which by this time had fought their way up to 400 km. The troop commander of the front ordered a verification of these data by air reconnaissance. In the evening Gen S. I. Rudenko defined the reconnaissance areas and ordered the commanders of three iak and the 282d iad during the day of 31 January using specially assigned crews from a low-level flight to carefully reconnoiter all the population points, forests and ravines in the given area.

As a result of the air reconnaissance carried out under extremely difficult weather conditions, it was established that solid columns of motor vehicles, wagons and enemy infantry stretching kilometers in length were continuing to retreat behind the Oder. The air scouts did not detect concentrations of tank units. Further events affirmed the correctness of these data. The results of air reconnaissance provided a basis for the commander of the front

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to take a decision to drive rapidly toward the Oder with the tank formations and to capture a bridgehead on its western bank without halting.

The AA on 30 and 31 January made 919 sorties with the bad weather conditions, and these included 202 for bombing and strafing enemy troops and 222 sorties for air reconnaissance.

The enemy aviation, having increased its activities, operated against the troops of the front endeavoring to prevent the crossing of the Oder. A total of 172 aircraft overflights were counted.

During 1-3 February, the troops of the front, having encountered increased enemy resistance, waged intense battles for broadening the bridgeheads on the Oder, and a portion of the forces destroyed the encircled troops in Poznan and Schniedemühl. By the end of 3 February, they had completely cleared the eastern bank of the Oder of the enemy.

The AA formations, because of the bad weather conditions (solid clouds up to 50 meters in altitude, fogs and intermittent rain) and the softening of the flight fields, carried out restricted operations in predominantly covering the troops on the Oder and carrying out air reconnaissance. On 2 February, individual crews from the 3d IAP took off to bomb the bridge to the southeast of Stettin. The mission was carried out by only two crews out of the nine. Due to the bad weather the others were unable to reach the target and bombed an alternative target. The 9th Guards IAD transported fuel for the 7th Cavalry Corps.

As a total over the 3 days of February, the air army made 380 sorties, including 127 for reconnaissance and 165 for transporting cargo. In 12 air battles the fascists lost 8 aircraft. Here Lt Col N. D. Sklyarenko, Hero of the Soviet Union Maj V. N. Makarov and Sr Lt Kravtsov (the 283d IAD), Capt A. A. Zheleznikov (the 274th IAP), Sr Lt Ye. F. Tuzhilin (15th IAP) and others distinguished themselves.

With the Soviet troops reaching the Oder and the capturing of bridgeheads on its western bank in the area of Kustrin, the Vistula-Oder Operation was over. It ended with the defeat of the Nazi Army Group A and with the complete liberation of Poland. The army had reached the approaches to Berlin with 60-70 km remaining to the German capital.

In the operation from the Vistula to the Oder, the 16th AA, in keeping air superiority, provided direct support to the troops of the front and covered them against enemy aviation. With the development of the breakthrough and the pursuit of the Nazi troops, the assault planes and fighters of the AA, in cooperating closely with the mobile formations of the front, destroyed the retreating enemy columns and prevented the enemy from digging in on intermediate lines.

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Although the combat effort of the 16th AA was comparatively low at times due to the difficult weather and basing conditions, as a whole the results of its operations had a significant impact on the rapid advance of the troops of the front. The aviation started the defeat of the retreating enemy troops. It quickly sought out the columns and was the first to attack them, it caused the enemy losses and created blockages on the roads, while the forward detachments of the tank formations which hurried up completed the rout of the enemy columns.

The bombing of bridges and railroad stations for the purposes of interrupting enemy traffic on the major lines of communications held a special place in the operations of our aviation along with the attacks on the columns. Thus, from 16 through 20 January, during the period of the greatest development of the air pursuit of the retreating enemy, the 16th AA destroyed more than 10 major bridges and crossings and over 30 railroad stations. For attacking them the bombers and assault planes carried out 660 sorties and dropped 417 tons of bombs. The bomber formations were the basic strike force of the army. As a result the enemy was forced to abandon an enormous amount of rolling stock with valuable supplies, the organized retreat of the Nazi troops was thwarted and this facilitated their final defeat.

As a total during the period of the operation from the Vistula to the Oder, from 14 January through 3 February 1945, the air army made 11,193 aircraft sorties, including 3,775 for bombing and strafing enemy troops, 1,810 for covering the troops of the front, 1,944 for air reconnaissance, 2,178 for escorting assault planes and bombers (a portion of them with accompanying strafing), 1,058 for "free hunting," the strafing of airfields and the intercepting of enemy aircraft, and 428 for other missions.

The aviation destroyed and damaged a large quantity of enemy military equipment and transport, and put thousands of soldiers and officers out of action. In the 111 air battles, 85 fascist aircraft were shot down, and 18 were destroyed on the airfields.

The battle score of the air regiments during the operation increased by many tens and hundreds of knocked-out tanks, motor vehicles, guns and shot-down fascist airplanes. Thus the fliers of the 515th iap destroyed 34 airplanes, including 33 shot down by communists and Komsomol members. By the end of the war, the air regiment had brought the combat score up to 70 shot-down enemy aircraft. The regimental commander Lt Col G. V. Gromov made 400 combat sorties and destroyed 13 enemy aircraft. For skillful leadership of the air regiment and for personal feats, he was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

The combat losses of the air army during the operation occurred chiefly from enemy antiaircraft fire.

For the exemplary execution of the missions of the command in battles against the Nazi invaders in the liberation of Warsaw, by an Ukase of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet, the following decorations were presented: The

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Order of the Red Banner to the 133d and 739th iap (commanders Lt Cols K. A. Tovstakhiy and V. F. Klimov); the Order of Suworov, Second Degree to the 221st bad and the 273d iad (commanders Cols S. F. Buzylev and N. V. Isayev); the Order of Kutuzov, Second Degree to the 301st bad (commander, Col F. M. Fedorenko); the Order of Suworov, Third Degree to the 128th bap, the 233d iap, the 618th shap, the 774th iap and the 805th shap (commanders Lt Cols M. M. Voronkov, V. V. Kravtsev and I. B. Kotik, Maj A. A. Makogon and P. T. Karev); the Order of Kutuzov, Third Degree to the 779th bap and the 98th okrap (commanders Lt Cols A. V. Khranchenkov and I. S. Tichchenko).

The units which distinguished themselves in the capturing of the city of Radom received the following decorations: The Order of the Red Banner to the 176th iap (commander Maj V. N. Makarov); the Order of Bogdan Khmel'nitskiy, Second Degree to the 515th and 519th iap, the 106th shap (commanders Lt Cols G. V. Gromov and K. N. Murga, Maj S. K. Yefremov); the Order of Suworov, Third Degree to the 518th iap and the 904th shap (commanders Lt Cols N. G. Khudokormov and P. G. Ovcharenko). The Order of Suworov Third Degree was also presented to the 352d iap (commander Lt Col P. I. Khara) which distinguished itself in capturing the town of Inowroclaw.

In the Vistula-Oder Operation, particularly distinguishing themselves were the 3d, 6th and 13th iak headed by Gens Ye. Ye. Savitskiy, I. M. Dzusev and B. A. Sidnev. During the period of the offensive, the fliers led by them dependably covered the troops of the front against air attack and boldly strafed the enemy on the ground.

Ibragim Magometovich Dzusev was born in 1905. At the age of 19 he volunteered for the Red Army. After 2 years of service he became a communist. During the Great Patriotic War he rose from the commander of an air regiment as a major to the commander of an air corps as a major general aviation. The 6th iak under his command participated in the Belorussian and subsequent operations and for the successful execution of missions was repeatedly commended in the orders of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief. The air corps and all of the air units which comprised it were given honorary names and were presented with orders. During the period of the war, the fliers of the corps made 18,654 combat sorties and in 1,243 air battles shot down 832 enemy aircraft. Gen I. M. Dzusev in May 1945 was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union for the exemplary fulfillment of missions on the front of the struggle against the Nazi invaders, for able leadership of the operations of the air formations and units, and for the personal combat services and the courage, valor and heroism shown therein. At present Maj Gen Avn (Ret) I. M. Dzusev lives in the Caucasus and participates actively in the military patriotic indoctrination of the youth.

Boris Arsen'yevich Sidnev was born in 1911. He arrived in aviation as a 19-year-old youth. In 1931 he became a party member. He participated in the Great Patriotic War from the first days. In June 1941, as the head of a sad he fought on the Northwestern Front; a year later the iad under his command was covering troops in the battle of Stalingrad. In 1944, the 13th

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lak of Gen B. A. Sidnev was operating on the left wing of the First Belorussian Front, and subsequently on the Warsaw-Berlin sector. As a pilot he had completely mastered flying techniques, and as a commander he was well trained in operational-tactical terms, and he ably led the party political work in the units of the corps. To his score were 140 combat sorties and 4 enemy aircraft personally shot down. During the period of the war, under the leadership of B. A. Sidnev, the fliers of the corps made 11,828 combat sorties and shot down 405 enemy aircraft. In May 1945, Gen B. A. Sidnev was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union for skillful leadership of the operations of the air corps, for personal combat services and for the valor and courage shown therein. After the war Col Gen Avn B. A. Sidnev commanded the aviation of a district. At present he is in the reserves and carries out extensive military patriotic work.

In the Battles for the Kustrin Bridgehead

After the completion of the Vistula-Oder Operation the troops of the First Belorussian Front in February 1945 continued operations to expand the bridgeheads in the region of Kustrin and capture the Poznan and Schneidemühl forces, they repelled enemy counterattacks on the right wing of the front and carried out preparations for the Eastern Pomeranian Operation.

The 16th AA assisted the troops of the front in carrying out these missions and waged a fierce struggle against enemy aviation for air superiority.

With the advance of the troops of the front to the Oder, the securing of airfields for the AA units became much more complicated as the Germans in retreating had blow up the landing strips, and the dirt airfields due to the thaw which occurred suddenly after the snowfalls and rains had softened and the airplanes literally stuck in the mud. Certain air units which did not have prepared airfields ahead of them lagged 100-140 km behind the front line. Under these conditions their combat activities became very difficult due to the limited range of the aircraft. When the tank and then the combined-arms armies approached the Oder, the air units were unable to provide the necessary cover and support for the ground forces.

At the same time, the enemy, in possessing a large number of airfields with man-made landing strips in the Berlin sector, concentrated significant air forces here, and at the beginning of February undertook a desperate attempt to win air superiority and to increase the support of its troops. Fierce air battles developed over the battlefield.

The most difficult air situation developed in the first 10 days of February, when the enemy aviation on individual days made 2,000-3,000 aircraft overflights, attacking our troops on the bridgeheads and crossings in the region of Kustrin. As a total during the 10 days of February, in the area of the front 13,950 overflights of enemy aircraft were counted.



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The 16th AA, without possessing suitable airfields near the Oder, was able to make just 1,530 sorties. During this period German aviation seized the initiative in the air over the battlefield.

The AA did not have sufficient forces and means to rapidly prepare hard-surfaced landing strips. The troops of the front provided significant help to the AA in preparing these airfields. Upon orders of Mar SU G. K. Zhukov, the combined-arms armies built brick and crushed rock air strips at six field airfields by their own forces. In addition, equipment of the front delivered metal plates for five airfields and these were laid by the special units.

But it was not easy to rebase to the newly built airfields, since the air units were unable to take off from the field airstrips which had been softened by bad weather. Under these conditions, upon the initiative of the commander of the 3d iak, Gen Ye. Ya. Savitskiy, the nearby straight areas of highways and roads were used for taking off, and the airplanes were pushed here by hand. On 7 February the best trained fliers from the 15th iap of the 278th iad for the first time used these "take-off" strips. Only by 16 February was it possible to supply the fighters with hard-surfaced airfields.

In the second 10 days of February, 3,140 aircraft overflights were noted for the enemy. The 16th AA during this period was able to sharply increase its activities and made 7,272 sorties. In the 285 air battles carried out in February, our fighters shot down 229 enemy aircraft on the approaches to the Oder. In suffering such heavy losses the fascist pilots began to avoid encounters with our fighters.

The troops of the front during all of February continued to wage heavy battles on the western bank of the Oder. The enemy tried at whatever price to throw back our troops and eliminate the bridgeheads seized by them.

Regardless of the bad weather conditions as well as the lack of field airfields and a sharp rise in the activity of enemy aviation, the fighters of the 16th AA constantly carried out offensive operations and in a majority of instances remained the masters in the air, even with the numerical superiority of the enemy. Our fliers promptly guessed the tactics of the enemy and due to their valor and courage and to the skillful use of all the qualities of their airplanes and their weapons, almost always achieved victory.

In the February air battles, many fliers distinguished themselves. Thus, on 10 February Maj A. Ye. Rubakhin (3d iak), Jr Lt M. A. Babenko and Lt N. V. Lopatin (265th iad), Jr Lt V. S. Tkachenko (278th iad) and Lt V. I. Aleksandryuk (by the end of the war he had made 252 combat sorties and personally shot down 15 enemy aircraft and 4 in group actions, and on 29 June 1945, he became a Hero of the Soviet Union) each shot down 2 fascist aircraft.

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On 11 February, the radar detected enemy airplanes approaching the crossings at Kustrin. For repelling the raids, a group of six Yak-3 on alert from the 402d iap under the command of Capt A. A. Volkov took off from Morin airfield. Having encountered ten FW-190 and four Me-109 at an altitude of 4,000 meters over enemy territory, the attack foursome of Volkov attacked the group of Fokker-Wulfs, and the covering element of Lt K. V. Podbrutnyy held the Messerschmitts. In the ensuing battle Lts Podbrutnyy and N. P. Pryadko shot down one fascist each. The combat formation of the enemy airplanes was disrupted and they withdrew from battle without reaching the target.

On the same day, four Yak-9 from the 518th iap led by Capt V. N. Korshunov was guided near Seelow to eight FW-190. Upon the command "Attack All!" the Yaks made a surprise attack from above and behind, and in this Capt Korshunov and Lts G. I. Vetrov and Ye. P. Zamyatkin immediately shot down three FW-190. The remaining fascist fliers by a rapid dive retreated to the west.

On 12 February, the deputy commander of the 176th Guards iap, twice Hero of the Soviet Union Maj I. N. Kozhedub in an element with Lt V. A. Gromakovskiy, in carrying out "free hunting" on La-7 aircraft near Kustrin, at an altitude of 350-500 meters under the clouds encountered 13 FW-190 carrying bombs. Guardsman Kozhedub immediately shot down an enemy aircraft by attacking from below and behind. A second attack followed against another Fokker-Wulf from a range of 100-150 meters. The enemy fighter engulfed in dense flames dove toward the ground. After this Kozhedub began to pursue a third FW-190. Having dropped its bombs on its own territory, the fascist endeavored to escape from the Soviet fighter in a low-altitude flight, but he was caught and also destroyed. In initiating combat, one of the Fokker-Wulfs which had dove out of the clouds tried to attack Kozhedub. But his teammate Gromakovskiy drove off the enemy attack and set it afire. During the second attack by Kozhedub, Gromakovskiy saw another Fokker-Wulf below to the right. Having made certain that his commander was not in danger, he attacked the enemy from above and behind and shot it down. By able actions the element of hunter fighters disrupted the combat formation of the numerically superior group of FW-190 and shot down five fascist aircraft.

This battle was watched by the commander of the 5th Assault Army Gen N. E. Berzarin. Inspired by the valor of our fliers, he commended them for the help to the troops.

In other air battles on this day, Lt I. D. Radchikov (402d iap), Maj A. S. Kumanichkin, Sr Lt A. Ye. Statsenko and Lt G. P. Orlov (176th Guards iap), Maj V. I. Suvirov and L. N. Slizen', Sr Lt S. N. Morgunov (he shot down two aircraft), Lt M. S. Barabanov and Jr Lt P. N. Gorokhov (15th iap) emerged the winners in other air battles.

In the air battles of 17 and 18 February, distinguished flying was shown by: Jr Lts A. N. Zamo and V. G. Krivolapov and Sr Lt S. P. Shpunyakov in the 265th iad; Jr Lt I. S. Osipov and Lt G. I. Makarov in the 278th iad; Lts N. A. Brodskiy and N. I. Luzin, Sr Lt A. I. Chetvertikov,

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Capt A. A. Kukov and Lt Col K. A. Tovstashiy in the 234th iad; Jr Lt M. Ye. Privalov and Capt N. V. Sorokin in the 193d iad; Lts S. I. Ponomarev and Smirnov, Capt V. A. Bychkov in the 283d iad; Maj D. S. Titorenko in the 176th Guards iap, and others.

On 19 February, two groups of four Yak-3 from the 233d iap under the command of Sr Lt G. S. Akhmetov and Lt A. M. Yershov were covering the troops to the south of Stargard. Suddenly six FW-190s emerged from the clouds at an altitude of 2,500 meters and attacked Yershov's group. Yershov turned and in turn closed in on the enemy. In ending up between two Fokker-Wulfs in the course of combat, in order not to express himself to enemy fire Yershov turned sharply to the left and rammed the tail of the fascist with his wing bracket. The FW-190 went into an uncontrolled dive and exploded on the ground. Simultaneously Yershov's wingmen shot down one FW-190 each.

At this time Akhmetov's group engaged at first six Me-109 and then another four. Using the advantage of the Yak-3 in maneuvering. Akhmetov shot down one Messerschmitt.

In the course of the battle, four other FW-190 showed up, and the eight Soviet fighters had to fight against 20 fascist pilots. In the air a noisy tangle of fighting aircraft was formed. The enemy fighters having gotten into a disadvantageous position dropped out of battle by disappearing in the clouds or diving. As a result Sr Lt G. S. Akhmetov, Lts M. A. Brovarets, N. F. Yevseyev, V. M. Kotrovskiy and Ye. V. Tarasenkov each shot down one fascist aircraft, and Lts A. M. Yershov and N. N. Likhov each bagged two. Thus, our eight fliers destroyed nine fascist aircraft without having any losses on their side.

On 21 February, an element of Yak-9 from the 347th iap headed by Sr Lt G. I. Linnik during a free search at an altitude of 1,800 meters encountered six bombers flying toward our bridgehead at Kustrin. Their cover group which was engaged by our fighters fell behind the bombers. In taking advantage of this, Linnik attacked the bombers and hit one of them. Then he set a second enemy aircraft on fire. The remainder dove and turned west. The wingman Jr Lt G. A. Chirkov caught a bomber and shot it down. The able actions of the "hunter" element thwarted the enemy's intentions of dropping their bombload on our troops.

In the second and third 10 days of February, as our fighters were rebased to the forward airfields, the air situation changed. In the course of the air battles, air superiority which had been temporarily lost by our aviation was restored.

During the period from 4 through 26 February, the AA, in addition to supporting the troops of the front on the Oder and fighting for air superiority, aided the troops in wiping out the enemy garrison in the Poznan fortress and in the regions of Schneidemühl and Stargard.

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In the course of the struggle for Poznan, our aviation with the forces of two regiments from the 3d bak, destroyed the pillboxes and individual fortress buildings, the 11th Guards shad aided the assault groups in capturing certain objectives, and the 9th Guards nbad by continuous bombing strikes attacked the enemy troops which were beseiged in the fortress. Here the personnel had to operate against small but important targets and exceptionally precise bombing was required for knocking them out. The following examples show how our pilots and navigators carried this out. On 13 February, a group of six Il-2 from the 173d Guards shap under the command of Capt M.I. Rumyantsev took off for attacking the troops encircled in Poznan. At an altitude of 400 meters, the group made a trial run for locating the target. Seeing stacks of ammunition boxes in one of the areas, the group commander ordered: "Attack behind me!" The bombs dropped precisely by the assault planes caused a great explosion.

On 14 February, the squadron commander of the 96th Guards bap Maj A. P. Smirnov with the navigator Capt A. A. Tsaregorodskiy received a mission of destroying a broadcasting station in the fortress. Having encountered cloudiness, they were unable to make a diving attack and they bombed the target from horizontal flight at an altitude of 700 meters, dropping four high explosive bombs of 100 and 250 kg. The radio station was knocked out by direct bomb hits, and the enemy was deprived of radio communications. Capt A. A. Tsaregorodskiy by the end of the war had 176 successful sorties, and in May 1946, was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

On 16 February the squadron commander of the 34th bap Maj M. F. Gor'kiy with the navigator Sr Lt M. A. Miroshnikov was to destroy a Nazi strongpoint, the southern gates of the fortress. The crew made a divebombing attack from an altitude of 2,000 meters and by a direct hit with a 250-kg bomb destroyed the tower of the southern gates. The combat mission was carried out.

On 18 February, Sr Lt Yu. Ya. Vorob'yev (the 34th bap) with the regimental navigator M. S. Monov by precision bombing from a horizontal flight blew up an ammunition dump in the center of the fortress.

In suppressing the resistance from enemy troops in Poznan, good actions were carried out by assault plans groups from the 175th Guards shap under the command of Capt M. A. Prosvirnov, Sr Lt B. N. Tikhonov and Jr Lt F. S. Shmyrin, as well as Capt M. I. Kuchinskiy (173d Guards shap). All four fliers, having made 115-140 combat sorties each by the end of the war, destroyed a large amount of enemy military equipment and much personnel. They became holders of the Order of Lenin and the Gold Star of a Hero.

On 23 February, Moscow saluted the troops of the First Belorussian Front which had captured the city and fortress of Poznan. The order of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief pointed out that along with the troops, the fliers of Maj Gen Avn Komarov, Col Yakobson, Lt Cols Novikov, Lysenko, Volkov, Leonov and Vasil'yev, and Maj Abroskin distinguished themselves.

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In assisting the formations of the 8th Guards Army in capturing the fortress of Poznan, the air formations of the 16th AA carried out 1,834 sorties, including 372 by Pe-2 bombers, 217 by Il-2 assault planes and 1,245 by the Po-2 night bombers (including 633 during the day). Here 558 tons of bombs were dropped.

The response from the commander of the 29th Guards Rifle Corps Gen A. D. Shemenkov is affirmation of the major role played by aviation in defeating the enemy Poznan garrison. "During the period from 9 through 18 February, the air units of the 3d bak bombed the fortification works in the fortress and the approaches to it. The operations were carried out very effectively and the precision of the bombing was high. During this period the bombers effectively aided our units in defeating the encircled grouping. The fliers, navigators and all the personnel which took a direct part in the operations merit commendation."

For the exemplary fulfillment of the missions of the command in battles against the German invaders in capturing the city and fortress of Poznan, the following decorations were presented: The Order of the Red Banner to the 45th Guards nbap (commander Maj I. F. Abroskin); the Order of Suvorov Third Degree to the Guards 23d nbad, the 58th and 175th shap (commanders Lt Cols P. S. Leonov, Hero of the Soviet Union V. D. Panfilov and M. G. Volkov); the Order of Kutuzov Third Degree to the 34th bap, the 96th Guards bap and the 173d Guards shap (commanders Lt Col V. A. Novikov, Col A. Yu. Yakobson and Hero of the Soviet Union Lt Col N. K. Lysenko).

On 23 February, the ranks of Heroes of the Soviet Union were added to in the army. By an Ukase of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet this honorary title was added to (in addition to those previously mentioned): Capts P. M. Kruglov and S. K. Khryukin; Sr Lts O. I. Malov, N. F. Pisarevskiy, Ye. N. Selyanin and V. I. Sharkov; Lts V. S. Gavrilov and N. B. Stratiyevskiy. Capt A. Ye. Borovykh was awarded a second Gold Star of the Hero of the Soviet Union.

As a total from 4 through 26 February, the AA made 9,624 combat sorties, including 4,360 for bombing and strafing the enemy.

Simultaneously with the fierce struggle to retain and extend the bridgeheads on the western bank of the Oder, the 5th Assault and 8th Guards armies fought to capture the city and fortress of Kustrin.

The beginning of the troop offensive on Kustrin was preceded by extended air softening up of its objectives. Having received the mission to destroy the strongpoint and the fortress of Kustrin, Gen S. I. Rudenko assigned the 3d bak, the 221st bad, the 242d nbad and the 9th shak to this target, and gave instructions on the methods of action. In particular, the 3d bak was to assign a group of sniper divebombers.

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The 242d nbad began bombing the strongpoint of Kustrin on 17 February, and the remaining air formations on 5 March. From the responses of the combined-arms command, the 3d bak carried out excellent actions; it was covered by the pilots of the 1st Guards iad. Particularly effective was the attack on Kustrin on 8 March by 9 Pe-2 led by the commander of the 96th Guards bap, Guards Col A. Yu. Yakobson. In two runs the bombers destroyed 16 plant buildings which had been adapted by the enemy for defenses.

The aviation aided the troops in capturing Kustrin primarily by systematically destroying all the structures used by the Nazis for defense, and during the period of the final storming of the city it destroyed enemy infantry in the trenches and artillery mortars. The continuous air strikes during the day and at night caused the enemy enormous losses in personnel and equipment, they wore down and demoralized the enemy troops and accelerated the defeat of the enemy garrison.

On 12 March 1945, Moscow saluted the troops of the First Belorussian Front which had captured the city of Kustrin.

The order of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief pointed out that along with the troops, the fliers of Cols Fedorenko, Berkal', Timofeyev, Kalinin and Fedorov had distinguished themselves in combat.

The remnants of the destroyed fascist garrison escaped to the islands in the interfluvium of the Oder and Warta, and dug in at Kustrin fortress.

For assisting the troops in destroying the enemy in the fortress, the commander of the 16th AA gave the mission to the commanders of the 3d bak and 242d nbad to begin destroying the fortress works and to neutralize the enemy troops around-the-clock. The bombing of the fortress started on 13 March. Later the 6th and 9th shak and the 11th Guards shad were involved in this.

The sniper divebombers usually operated in fives under a fighter cover. Two or three aircraft dove simultaneously over the target. Each divebomber made two-three runs, carrying two 100-500-kg high explosive bombs. The attacks by the divebombers on the fortress, regardless of the small size of the targets, were very effective. Thus, on 24 March Capt V. P. Mel'nik with the navigator Sr Lt P. A. Kisilitsyn (96th Guards bap) while over the target received a radio command from the deputy commander of the 301st bad Lt Col S. P. Sennikov who was at the command post of the 8th Guards Army: "Strike the large house in the northern part of the fortress." The Snipers Mel'nik and Kisilitsyn on the first pass with a direct hit by a 500-kg bomb destroyed the target and caused a large explosion, presumably an ammunition dump. A group under the command of Capt M. G. Voskresenskiy also attacked the forts of the fortress successfully.

During the night of 25 March under bad weather conditions, the fliers and navigators of the 717th nbad set an example of operations against the fortress. Due to the good organization, the air regiment during the night made 211 sorties and dropped 35 tons of bombs. The airplanes in coming one

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after another remained continuously over the target. Certain crews made ten combat sorties during the night. Particularly distinguishing themselves were the pilot Jr Lt Dorogan and navigator Lt Krylenko. From an altitude of 600 meters by a direct bomb hit they blew up an ammunition dump in the fortress. The commander of the regiment Lt Col V. Ye. Kalinin spent a larger portion of the night in the air over the fortress, he monitored the actions of his crews and controlled them, indicating the objectives for the crews.

As a total the air army made 3,150 sorties against the strongpoint and fortress of Kustrin, including 389 by the daylight bombers, 2,196 by the night bombers and 575 sorties by the assault planes. Here 876 tons of bombs were dropped. The air strikes destroyed a significant number of artillery and mortar batteries, ammunition dumps and enemy personnel. The fortress was almost completely destroyed and burned out and the resistance of the garrison was crushed. The troops of the 8th Guards Army took it on 29 March.

For exemplary execution of the missions of the command in battles against the German invaders in capturing the city and fortress of Kustrin and for the valor and courage shown in this, the 661st nbap (commander Lt Col V. N. Sonin) was awarded the Order of the Red Banner, and the 24th bap (commander Lt Col A. I. Sokolov) received the Order of Suvorov, Third Degree.

The basic organizers of the daylight bombing strikes against the Kustrin fortress were the commanders of the 301st and 241st bad Cols F. M. Fedorenko and A. G. Fedorov and their immediate superior the commander of the 3d bak Gen A. Z. Karavatskiy.

Afanasiy Zinov'yevich Karavatskiy was born in 1902. He began flying in 1925. Soon thereafter pilot Karavatskiy showed unusual abilities and flying skill. In 1936, for the exemplary military training of a unit Communist Karavatskiy was awarded the Order of Lenin. Col Karavatskiy entered the war as a division commander. A year later he was assigned to organize the 3d bak which in March 1943 became part of the 16th AA. This corps was the basic strike force of the AA in all the operations from the Kursk arc to Berlin. For successful combat the air corps was awarded several honorary names, and was given the Order of Suvorov while its commander received two Orders of Lenin, four Orders of the Red Banner, four Orders of Suvurov and Kutuzov and many medals. At present Lt Gen Avn (Ret) A. Z. Karavatskiy carried out extensive military patriotic work.

In March 1945, a fierce battle for the holding and extending of the bridgeheads on the Oder continued not only on the ground but also in the air. Enemy aviation repeatedly attempted to bomb and strafe the troops of the front on the bridgeheads and crossings. The fighters of the 16th AA conducted an intense struggle against fascist aviation. In the air on individual days there were 50-70 air battles.

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Thus, on 3 March our fighters conducted 49 air battles in which 37 fascist airplanes were shot down. The heroes of the day were the fliers of the 6th iak. Lt V. S. Velichko won four victories in the air, Capt G. A. Danilenkov, Lt S. I. Andreyenko and Jr Lt V. N. Dubakin each shot down two aircraft; the flier of the 133d iap Sr Lt N. M. Antipov destroyed a fascist by a ram with his Yak-3. The flier of the 3d iak Sr Lt Ye. A. Donchenko shot down two enemy aircraft.

From 5 through 8 March, 74 air battles were held in which the Nazis lost 84 airplanes. The fliers of the 234th iad distinguished themselves in the battles. Lts V. S. Velichko, N. F. Yevseyev and A. M. Yershov each shot down three enemy aircraft, and Maj Ya. L. Ovodov, Hero of the Soviet Union Capt V. N. Yashin, Lts N. A. Brodskiy, A. A. Kol'tsov, V. M. Kotrovskiy, G. A. Pashkov and V. A. Sitnikov each destroyed two aircraft. In the 265th iad, Lt V. P. Timoshek and Jr Lts M. A. Babenko, A. N. Zamno and I. Ye. Sidorenko each also shot down two aircraft; in the 193d iad, Capt N. V. Sorokin and in the 176th Guards iap Sr Lt P. I. Maslyakov each shot down two aircraft. One enemy aircraft was destroyed by Lt Col V. S. Mukhin, Maj V. S. Baskov and Capt N. D. Dugin (on 2 May 1945 he perished in carrying out a mission. During the time of the war he destroyed 14 enemy aircraft and was posthumously awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.), and many others. In addition the pilots of the 265th iad, Sr Lt M. Ye. Pivovarov and Lt P. F. Gavrilin, respectively, shot down two and one enemy aircraft. Maj V. V. Klimov (278th iad) also bagged a fascist. Pivovarov, Gavrilin and Klimov by the end of the war had each 19-26 victories in the air and were awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

On 7 March, Capt L. I. Ryshiy with Jr Lt N. P. Bugayev (347th iap) was "free hunting." In the region of Beeskow at an altitude of 2,500 meters they saw six FW-190 flying to the east. Having climbed above the enemy, our fliers from behind and from the direction of the sun surprise attacked the group of Fokker-Wulfs. The fascists, having dropped their bombs on their territory, began to retreat to the west. The "hunters" not only thwarted the enemy's attempt to bomb our troops, but in pursuing in several attacks they each shot down one enemy aircraft.

On 8 March four Yak-3 from the 283d iad headed by Sr Lt S. I. Ponomarev were covering the troops in the area of the Kustrin bridgeheads. At an altitude of 2,800 meters, Ponomarev noticed a group of 15 Ju-87 and Ju-88 under the cover of 14 FW-190 and Me-109. Having taken up an advantageous position, Ponomarev led his foursome into the attack on the bombers. In the ensuing battle Lt V. F. Budilin and then the group commander shot down a Ju-88 and a FW-190. The bombers dropped their bombs chaotically and without observing the formation hurriedly turned to the west. Thus four Yaks drove off a major grouping of enemy airplanes.

The intensity of the air battles rose every day. On 11 March there were 74 battles in which our fliers shot down 56 aircraft. Victories in the air were won by Gen Ye. Ya. Savitskiy, Col P. F. Chupikov, Sr Lt N. S. Rudenko, Lts N. M. Khristinin and S. P. Shpunyakov (265th iad), I. F. Krivobok, V. S. Tkachenko and D. I. Suslov (278th iad) and others.



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The 273d iad particularly distinguished itself. Fifteen fliers of the division, including Lt Col K. A. Tavstashiy, Maj A. G. Turov, Capt L. G. Koptev, I. P. Nechipurenko and M. P. Rents, Lts N. Ya. Blizhin, G. P. Ignatenko, and others, shot down 16 enemy aircraft. The commander of the 273d iad Col N. V. Isayev for able leadership of the division and for the nine aircraft personally shot down in 38 air battles and the four in group action was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

Equally fierce battles occurred on 22 and 23 March. The fliers of the AA during these two days carried out 117 air battles and destroyed 110 German aircraft. Increasing their combat score were: Lt N. V. Lopatin (265th iad), Sr Lts M. I. Dydygin and I. G. Kuznetsov, Lts M. S. Barabanov, I. F. Chernenkov and M. A. Kuzin (278th iad), Capt I. I. Shcherbakov (for the able leadership of a squadron and for the 15 aircraft shot down by him, he became a Hero of the Soviet Union), Lts V. I. Aleksandryuk, A. F. Vas'ko (176th Guards iap), and many others.

On 22 March the flier of the 812th iap Lt L. I. Sivko on a piston-engined Yak shot down a German jet fighter, the Me-262. This happened as follows. At 1820 hours, four Yak-9 headed by Capt V. I. Mel'nikov were covering the troops in the region of Zehin. The fighters were flying at an altitude of 2,500 meters at a speed of 550 km per hour. Suddenly Sivko saw a powerful sheath of flame explode below his Yak in the direction of the aircraft of Capt Mel'nikov, and at the next instant an unusual, propellerless enemy aircraft flew by them at a high speed and climbing. And when the fascist began to turn, Sivko from a range of 100 meters released a long cannon burst at him. Dense black smoke poured from the right wing of the Messerschmitt and then it turned over in the air and fell in the area of Zehin.<sup>1</sup>

On the same day, two elements of La-7 from the 176th Guards iap led by twice Hero of the Soviet Union Maj I. N. Kozhedub and Her of the Soviet Union Maj A. S. Kumanichkin took off for "free hunting." In the region of Seelow they encountered up to 30 FW-190 flying in two waves. Kozhedub attacked the upper group of four Fokker-Wulfs from the rear with the sun behind him and from a range of 100-50 meters shot down one of them. The other man in the element, Maj D. S. Titorenko, simultaneously shot down a second fascist. Pulling out of the attack in a combat turn, Kozhedub closed in on the second four FW-190 and in a lightning attack set a third enemy aircraft on fire. Guardsman A. S. Kumanichkin, having noticed up to 20 FW-190 below him, attacked the trailing element and from a range of 100-150 meters shot down one fighter which fell to the west of Seelow. His wingman V. A. Gromakovskiy attacked a second Fokker-Wulf and also shot it down. The enemy pilot bailed out. Thus two guardsmen elements emerged the victors over a numerically superior air enemy.

In March 1945, in the Kustrin sector our fliers carried out 303 air battles and destroyed 213 fascist aircraft, in maintaining air superiority.

<sup>1</sup> Arkhiv MO SSSR, folio 368, inv. 6476, file 480, sheet 274; file 485, sheet 517.

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Over Eastern Pomerania

By the end of the Vistula-Oder Operation, the troops on the right wing of the First Belorussian Front were extended in a front to the north from the Vistula to the Oder. The area between the adjacent Second Belorussian Front was weakened. The threat arose of a strike by Nazi troops from the north at the troops of the First Belorussian Front which were advancing to the Oder.

By this time, the Nazi command had created a large grouping of troops numbering up to 35 divisions in Eastern Pomerania. They were supported by units of the 6th Air Fleet numbering around 300-400 aircraft, including more than 60 percent fighters.

Even in mid-February the troops of the First Belorussian Front with the support and cover of the AA had to repel attempts by the Nazi troops to pierce the defenses of the armies on the right wing.

The elimination of the Eastern Pomeranian enemy grouping was assigned by Headquarters to the troops of the Second Belorussian Front and the right wing of the First Belorussian Front. The offensive was planned to be started by the forces of the First Belorussian Front on 1 March. The main strike was to be made by troops from the 3d Assault and 61st armies, the 1st and 2d Guards tank armies from the region of Arnswalde to Kohlberg and Kammin.

The 16th AA received the mission prior to the offensive of neutralizing enemy aviation at the nearby airfields and destroying the strongpoints in the sector of the main strike. Then by escorting and covering the troops of the front, and particularly the tank armies, to assist in defeating the Eastern Pomeranian grouping.

For the purpose of weakening enemy aviation, Gen S. I. Rudenko decided to make a simultaneous attack on the airfields of Finowfurt, Altdamm and Stettin with the forces of 60 assault planes and 90 fighters. According to the air reconnaissance data, up to 200 aircraft were based at these airfields. The strike was planned for 28 February an hour before the onset of darkness when all the enemy airplanes would be at the airfields.

The attack against Finowfurt Airport was made by 20 assault planes from the 724th shap (300th shad). They were supported by fighters from the 193d iad which were split into the direct cover group (18 fighters) and a strike group (12 fighters). Some 25 km from the target, the fighter strike group from the 515th iap, having moved ahead to seal off the enemy airfield, encountered 10 enemy aircraft approaching the airfield for a landing, and attacked them. Sr Lt S. Ye. Putimtsev was the first to shoot down a Fokker-Wulf, and the aircraft like a burning torch fell in the area of the air field. Then one Ju-88 approaching for a landing was destroyed by Lt A. V. Nikulenkov. The same fate befell a Ju-87 which was shot down by Sr Lt S. A. Bakhayev. The enemy antiaircraft weapons did not open fire.

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At 1850 hours, the first five assault planes approached the airfield at an altitude of 900 meters, and followed by the subsequent ones. They attacked the aircraft parking areas, the antiaircraft points and the dumps. On the second pass the assault planes fired at the airplanes at the parking area. At this time the fighters of the attack group, in dealing with the enemy aircraft over the airfield, spotted the take-off of the element of FW-190 on the alert. Lt Nikulenkov attacked the taking-off fighter from above and behind and shot it down. In coming out of the attack in a combat turn, he hit the second climbing Fokker-Wulf. The successful sealing off of the enemy airfield by the strike group made it possible for the direct cover fighters to participate in the strafing of the field. They made three passes and with their fire damaged several parked aircraft. On the return trip the fighters encountered six FW-190 which had taken off from the Eberswalde airfield. The air combat with it was carried out by the strike group, and here Capt A. G. Podorozhnyy and Sr Lt S. P. Pusev each shot down one Fokker-Wulf. At Finowfurt airfield, where there were 54 aircraft at this time, the assault planes destroyed 15 aircraft, 3 antiaircraft batteries, they blew up 3 ammunition dumps and 2 fuel dumps, and destroyed 3 hangars. The cover fighters damaged 10 aircraft on the ground and 7 in the air.

Our pilots did not have any losses. The combat mission was carried out successfully due to the farsighted decision of the commander of the 300th shad Col V. A. Timofeyev, to the careful preparation of the crews and to the excellent coordination between the assault planes and fighters.

The attack on Altdamm airfield was made by assault planes from the 173d Guards shap escorted by fighters from the 133d iap. It was less successful since the group of IIs got into clouds and the order of their operations was disrupted. Only eight aircraft were destroyed, but it was noted that rockets hit the hangars and six aircraft parking areas.

For the attack on Stettin airfield, 18 Il-2 took off from the 175th Guards shap under the cover of fighters from the 402d iap, but because of bad weather they did not reach the target and they bombed Polhov airfield where three aircraft were destroyed and they strafed enemy troops on the roads.

The enemy, having lost 43 airplanes on the airfields and fearing repeated attacks, abandoned these airfields and moved the surviving aircraft to the rear.

The plan of the operation envisaged that in the sector of the main strike by the troops of the front prior to the offensive the forces of the AA would destroy the strongpoints of Steinberg, Klein Silber, Falkenwalde, Rafenstein, Altenweidel and Guntersberg in order to make it easier for the troops to pierce the enemy defenses.

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The commander of the 16th AA made the following decisions: The destruction of the enemy strongpoints would be started 2 days prior to the offensive of the troops of the front; the bombing and strafing would be carried out at night by Po-2 aircraft and during the day by Pe-2 and Il-2; for achieving the greatest results high explosive bombs would be used with a caliber up to 500 kg, incendiary and fragmentation bombs, as well as rockets; the carrying out of this mission was to be entrusted to the 3d bap, the 6th and 9th shak, the 11th Guards shad and the 9th Guards nbad.

During the night of 27 February and on 1 March, the night bombers destroyed the strongpoints of Klein Silber and Rafenstein, Falkenwalde and Guntersberg, having made 247 sorties against them. During the day of 27 and 28 February, the assault planes escorted by the fighters in small groups bombed and strafed six strongpoints, having made 524 sorties under difficult weather conditions. On 28 February, the 34th and 96th Guards bap in groups of seven-nine Pe-2 aircraft (instead of 47 aircraft) under fighter escort bombed the strongpoints of Klein Silber and Rafenstein, having dropped 38.5 tons of bombs. A particularly accurate strike against the Rafenstein strongpoint was made by nine planes from the 96th Guards bap led by the commander of the 301st bad Col F. M. Fedorenko.

As a total 851 sorties were made against the six strongpoints by the AA, including 561 by the bombers and assault planes. These dropped more than 200 tons of bombs. All the strongpoints were destroyed, and the troops of the front, in going over to the offensive, did not encounter significant resistance from the enemy. Along the way the aviators blew up 6 ammunition and fuel dumps, and they destroyed or damaged 128 guns, 85 motor vehicles and much other equipment.

The effectiveness of the air strikes was highly praised by the command of the ground forces.

The raids by the night bombers also produced a good result. Thus, on 28 February, the 9th Guards nbad operated in the area of the 80th Rifle Corps. Prior to the appearance of our airplanes the enemy had been shelling the battle formations of the Soviet troops and preventing an attack on the crossings over the Ina River. The enemy was paralyzed by the night bomber raids, the firing halted and our troops crossed this water barrier without losses.

The aviators of the 9th Guards nbad merited universal gratitude on the front. From the walls of Stalingrad to Berlin, this division was the basic strike force of the AA under night conditions. The indefatigable night workers under the leadership of the commander of the air division Guards Col K. I. Rasskazov almost every night flew out on a mission, sowing panic and death in the ranks of the Nazi invaders. During the years of the war, the division made around 64,000 sorties. Many fliers of the division had made 700-800 successful nighttime combat sorties. To the score of guardsmen Sr Lts K. F. Mikhaleiko, A. P. Martynov, V. T. Popovich and L. V. Rykov were 900-1,000 combat sorties. They all had been awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

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The offensive by the troops of the right wing of the First Belorussian Front started on 1 March. The formations of the 3d Assault Army and the 1st Polish Army after a 50-minute artillery and air softening up process, attacked the enemy and by noon had captured its main defensive zone. On the same day both tank armies were thrown into the breach.

During the day the AA assisted the troops in piercing the enemy defenses. Bomber groups from the 3d bak under the cover of the 1st Guards iad, as well as assault planes from the 6th and 9th shak and the 11th Guards shad under the cover of the 6th and 13th iak, destroyed enemy tanks, artillery, motor transport and personnel in the regions of Klein Silber, Jakobsdorf, Tornow, Temnik, and Butow. After the neutralizing of the enemy in the basic strongpoints, the air strikes were shifted deep into enemy defenses. The fighters of the 3d, 6th and 13th iak covered the battle formations of the troops and engaged in air reconnaissance and "free hunting." The 16th and 72d orap undertook reconnaissance activities in the Stettin and Berlin sectors.

As a total during the first day of the offensive the army made 945 sorties, including 486 for bombing and strafing the enemy. Here a significant quantity of enemy military equipment and personnel was put out of commission.

In six air battles the fliers of the 278th iad Terekhov and V. P. Timoshek and the 283d iad, Lts S. S. Yegorov, A. N. Kurov and I. I. Khokhlov, each shot down one FW-190.

The enemy aviation endeavored to bomb our crossings over the Oder and the troops in the region of Arnswalde. A total of 149 aircraft overflights were counted.

On 2 March under difficult weather conditions (solid clouds at an altitude of 100-300 meters and snowfall) the AA was able to make only 257 sorties, mainly for covering the troops, strafing the enemy and carrying out air reconnaissance. In five air battles, the fliers of the 265th iad D. N. Ashchaulov, V. V. Kalashnikov and P. F. Gavrilin each shot down an enemy aircraft.

On the third day of the offensive, the tank troops of the 1st Guards Tank Army by a rapid maneuver reached the area of Gross Radow. The Nazi troops retreated to the north in disorder. The 61st and 2d Guards tank armies were forced to repel counterattacks by large enemy tank and infantry forces in the region of Stargard.

During the day in the periods between snowfalls the AA in assisting the advancing troops of the front carried out active operations. The 3d bak, the 221st bad, the 6th and 9th shak, and the 11th Guards shad under the cover of the 1st Guards iad and three iak in groups bombed and strafed the enemy strongpoints, military equipment and personnel, chiefly for the 61st and 2d Guards tank armies.

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Of the many successfully executed bombings, we must mention the destruction of military objectives in Stargard by nine Pe-2 from the 96th Guards bap led by Guards Maj A. I. Fadeyev. The bombers destroyed 4 plant shops and 13 other structures as well as a section of the railroad embankment, and destroyed many loaded railway cars and motor vehicles.

As a total during the day, 1,546 sorties were made, including 614 to bomb and strafe enemy troops.

The enemy aviation, having increased its activities somewhat, resisted the advancing troops of the front and our aviation. Thus, six Il-2 from the 173d Guards shap led by Hero of the Soviet Union Capt M. I. Rummyantsev were strafing the retreating enemy in the region of Freienwalde. The planes were supported by four Yak-3 from the 133d iap headed by Capt G. A. Danilenkov. After the first run the assault planes were attacked by six FW-190 which were covered above by four fighters. The gunners met the enemy with heavy fire. The Yaks immediately entered the combat due to the able and decisive actions of the fighters, one FW-190 was shot down. Another Fokker-Wulf collided with our Yak and both exploded in the air. Six times the fascists endeavored to attack our assault planes, but each time they were rebuffed by the firing of the cover fighters and the gunners. The assault planes carried out their mission successfully, without losses.

On 4-5 March, the formations of the 1st Guards Tank Army reached the Baltic Sea to the west of Kohlberg and split the Eastern Pomeranian German grouping. The formations of the 2d Guards Tank Army began to advance toward Stettin Bay. The troops of the 61st Army after stubborn battles captured the important defensive center of Stargard.

The 9th Guards and 242d nbad during the night of 4 March destroyed enemy troops in the region of Stargard and along the road to Massow and Altdamm. During the day the 9th shak under the cover of the 13th iak continued to strafe the enemy troops in the same areas.

In assisting the troops in capturing the strongpoint of Stargard, the air formations in 7 days carried out 2,526 sorties and dropped over 3,000 bombs with a caliber from 50 to 500 kg.

On 5 March, the AA in line with the retreat of the enemy to Altdamm and the Oder received the mission of destroying the enemy crossings and troops on the approaches to them. In carrying out this mission, the 9th Guards nbad bombed Altdamm. Groups of aircraft from the 9th and 6th shak and the 11th Guards shad during the day destroyed the crossings over the Ost-Oder to the west of Altdamm. They stopped the retreat of the enemy troops and then by bombing and strafing attacks destroyed them in the concentration areas.

This day the most effective operations were those against enemy troops carried out by a group of 15 IIs from the 175th Guards shad under the command of Maj A. D. Svistunov. The leaders of the two groups of five planes were Sr Lts M. I. Fesenko and Sh. I. Shurgaya (both by the end of the war had

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110-112 combat sorties and they had been awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union). The eight cover fighters from the 234th IAD were led by Hero of the Soviet Union Capt V. N. Yashin. The group of assault planes in approaching the Matteusee reformed into a circle and attacked a concentration of fascist troops on the Kubland-Hohenkrug road. Having made two passes, the assault planes caused the enemy great losses.

In certain instances, the assault plane pilots, if this was required by the situation, assumed the mission of fighters and engaged the enemy bombers. Thus, a group of six Il-2 led by the commander of the 70th Guards Shap Lt Col A. I. Kuz'min was on its way to destroy the retreating enemy troops in the region of Hohenkrug. On the way to the target, the group encountered nine Ju-87 under the cover of four FW-190. Kuz'min decided to attack the enemy bombers. The cover fighters engaged the Fokker-Wulfs, and the six Il-2 attacked the Junkers. In the course of the battle, Lt Samoylenko shot down one Ju-87, Lt Col Kuz'min and Lt Moiseyev each hit one aircraft, and the remaining bombers, having dropped their bombs on their own territory, turned west in disorder.

On 4 and 5 March, the AA carried out 1,775 sorties, basically for assisting the advancing troops in the Stettin sector. In 20 air battles, 25 enemy airplanes were shot down. Our losses were 7 aircraft.

In the evening of 5 March, Moscow saluted the troops of the First Belorussian Front which had captured the towns of Stargard, Naugard and Polzin. In the battles for these towns, as was pointed out in the order of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, along with the troops the fliers of Cols Fedorenko, Sukhoryabov, Koryagin, Mironov, Kovalev, Isayev, Rasskazov and Kalinin had distinguished themselves.

By the end of 7 March, the troops of the front had reached Stettin Bay, having occupied the towns of Kammin and Gollnow.

The AA, in cooperating with the troops and independently, continued to destroy the enemy units retreating to the crossings over the Oder at Altdamm. At the same time the army was assisting the troops in the battles for the bridgeheads at Kustrin.

Over the 2 days, the AA made 2,245 combat sorties (including 703 at night) with bad weather conditions, and 1,292 were for bombing and strafing enemy troops, crossings and strongpoints.

The enemy aviation unsuccessfully endeavored to resist our aviation and troops.

The personnel of the AA, regardless of the complicating of the situation in the air, as before showed courage, valor and a desire to carry out the mission best. The fighters conducted 28 air battles and shot down 30 fascist aircraft. Here is one of these clashes.

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On 6 March, six Yak-3 from the 133d iap headed by Maj Ya. L. Ovodov, in escorting four Il-2 from the 173d Guards shap for strafing, encountered 12 Fokker-Wulf. With half its forces the enemy endeavored to attack the assault planes. Maj Ovodov, having ordered the element of Lt Kol'tsov to cover the assault planes, with the remaining comrades engaged the six FW-190. The assault planes led by Hero of the Soviet Union Guards Capt M. I. Kuchinskiy, having formed a circle, with the aid of the fighter element drove off the enemy attacks by the fire of the gunners. As a result of the battle, our fighters shot down 5 Fokker-Wulfs without having lost a single aircraft. The assault planes returned to their field also without losses. In this battle, in addition to Maj Ya. L. Ovodov, Capt I. P. Nechipurenko, Lt A. A. Kol'tsov and Jr Lt V. A. Sitnikov distinguished themselves. By the end of the war, Maj Ya. L. Ovodov had 18 air victories to his combat score, and for this he was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

In the following days prior to 20 March, the troops of the front conducted intense battles in the region of Altdamm, where the Nazis created strong bridgeheads, having concentrated up to six divisions here.

The 16th AA, in supporting the troops of the front in defeating the Altdamm grouping, each day made hundreds of sorties for destroying the strongpoints and the crossings and for knocking out enemy weapons and personnel.

Enemy troops in the region of Altdamm and to the southwest of Stettin were bombed and strafed almost each night by the 9th Guards nbad, and during the day by the 6th shak and 11th Guards shad. The 3d bak and the 221st bad on 11, 15 and 18 March bombed the strongpoints of Altdamm, Podeuch and Finkenwalde. The fighter formations covered the advancing troops of the front from the air, while the air scouts continuously supplied the command with data on the enemy at the front from the southern coast of the Baltic Sea to Furstenberg. During these days the assault planes were the most active.

On 9 March, a group of Il-2 from the 173d Guards shap under the command of Hero of the Soviet Union Capt M. I. Rumyantsev took off for neutralizing enemy weapons in the region of Altdamm. With the approach of the planes to the target, Rumyantsev saw that two artillery batteries and one mortar battery were firing at our troops from the Altdamm airfield, and on the western outskirts of the town, the trenches were occupied by infantry. Rumyantsev ordered that the discovered targets be attacked. The crews dropped their bombs and strafed with machine gun and cannon fire. At the same time the group of Sr Lt V. R. Lazarev destroyed the antiaircraft batteries which were putting up intensive fire. The assault planes made four passes and carried out the mission without losses.

On 11 March, 12 assault planes from the 174th Guards shap headed by Maj N. M. Matveyev were sent to attack enemy troops in the region of Altdamm. In clarifying the target for Matveyev, the ground radioed: "Hit Hekendorf." Having made certain that the orders were correct from the code word, the group of IIs bombed and strafed an artillery battery and an accumulation of motor vehicles. Then the ground radio commanded: "Hit the eastern outskirts of Altdamm." One of the foursomes of IIs attacked an artillery



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battery located there. Then the radio transmitted: "You attacked well, make the third run against the plant to the south of Altdamm." During this pass the crews saw six tanks in the plant yard. Two SCAA batteries opened fire against the assault planes. An entire group of the IIs attacked the plant and the tanks. The ground demanded: "Attack the plant again!" The assault planes made a fourth pass.

Finally the radio sent: "Good work, tell the next groups of assault planes to destroy targets in these same areas."

On 18 March, eight Il-2 from the 173d Guards shap under the command of Hero of the Soviet Union Capt N. M. Balakirev escorted by six Yak-3 from the 133d iap, took off to destroy enemy troops to the west of Altdamm. In fours the assault planes approached the target and from an altitude of 1,000 meters went in for the attack. The first group hit the perimeter, and the second headed by Hero of the Soviet Union Capt M. I. Kuchinskiy, detected a motor column moving from Altdamm to the crossing. In the following two passes, all eight planes formed a circle and destroyed the enemy troops and equipment by bombs, rockets, cannon and machine gun fire. The actions of the assault planes were corrected from the observation post of the combined-arms commander by the deputy commander of the 11th Guards shad Lt Col V. P. Khrumchenko. The assault planes knocked out several artillery batteries and many vehicles.

The fighters also fought well. On 11 March, 10 Yak-9 from the 518th iap under the command of Capt V. N. Korshunov were escorting 17 Il-2. Four FW-190 appeared over the target and they from the rear and above attacked 6 IIs pulling out of the attack. Korshunov and his foursome intercepted the Fokker-Wulfs and from a range of 100 meters from above and in front shot down their leader with cannon and machine gun fire. During this time another element of Fokker-Wulfs coming from the opposite direction endeavored to attack our assault plane from below. Lt D. N. Vereshchagin attacked this element from above and behind and from a short range shot down the leader which at an altitude of 400 meters flipped over and dove to the ground. In this battle, Lt Ye. P. Zamyatkin also distinguished himself as he shot down one fascist.

On 20 March, after many-day battles the resistance of the Nazis was crushed and the troops of the First Belorussian Front captured the town of Altdamm. In the order of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief it was pointed out that in the battles for this enemy strongpoint, along with the troops, the fliers of Maj Gen Avn Tatanashvili, Cols Isayev, Koryagin, Orlov and Rasskazov and Lt Col Nakonechnikov had distinguished themselves.

With this the Eastern Pomeranian Operation ended for the troops of the First Belorussian Front.

The air operations of the 16th AA accelerated the defeat of the enemy grouping in Eastern Pomerania. From 1 through 20 March, the army made 13,480 sorties, including 6,552 for bombing and strafing the enemy troops, 1,397

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for air reconnaissance and 879 for "hunting" and intercepting enemy aircraft. In the 228th air battles the enemy lost 251 aircraft.<sup>1</sup> As a total in March the fliers of the AA made 25,764 sorties, they conducted 531 air battles and destroyed 464 fascist aircraft.

For the exemplary fulfillment of the orders of the command in the Eastern Pomeranian Operation and for the valor and courage shown in this, by an Ukase of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet the following decorations were presented: The Order of the Red Banner to the 717th and 997th nbad (commanders Col V. Ye. Kalinin and Maj A. I. Kuznetsov); the Order of Suvarov, Second Degree to the 3d and 6th iak (commanders Gens Ye. Ya. Savitskiy and I. M. Dzusov), the 300th shad, the 193d and 234th iad (commanders Cols V. A. Timofeyev and S. I. Moronov and Gen Ye. Z. Tatanashvili); the Order of Suvarov, Third Degree to the 402d iap, the 765th shap and the 93d okrap (commanders Maj A. Ye. Rubakhin, Lt Cols V. G. Zanozdra and K. M. Myasoyedov); the Order of Aleksandr Nevskiy to the 53d and 55th Guards iap (commanders Maj A. A. Platonov and Lt Col V. I. Shishkin).

Particularly distinguishing themselves in the Eastern Pomeranian Operation were the 4th Polish sad, the 106th shap and the 515th iap (commanders Cols G. P. Turykin, Maj S. K. Yefremov and Lt Col G. V. Gromov); these were awarded the honorary name of Pomeranian.

The Eastern Pomeranian Offensive Operation was carried out under conditions which were unusual and difficult for the troops and aviation. During this period the troops of the First Belorussian Front, in addition, continued an intense struggle in the Berlin sector for holding onto and broadening the bridgehead on the Oder.

The 16th AA, without halting the intense struggle to maintain air superiority and in continuously supporting the troops in the Berlin sector, under extremely difficult weather and basing conditions was also to provide effective help to the troops on the right wing of the front in defeating the enemy groupings in Eastern Pomerania.

Here the enemy had to destroy large permanent defensive strongpoints as well as suppress and destroy the enemy aviation which in this sector put up desperate resistance. Then the aviation began active operations against the retreating enemy troops, it destroyed bridges and crossings, and created blockages on the roads and in every possible way impeding the retreat of the Nazi units provided great help to the troops of the front.

The victory of the Soviet troops in the Eastern Pomeranian Operation led to the collapse of the plan of the Nazi command which envisaged the launching of a flank attack against the troops of the First Belorussian Front. As a result favorable conditions were created for the final defeat of fascist Germany.

<sup>1</sup> Arkhiv MO SSSR, folio 368, inv. 6476, files 528-529, sheets 6, 17.

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In January-March 1945, the troops of the First Belorussian Front, in co-operating with the troops of the Second Belorussian and First Ukrainian fronts defeated the Nazis in Poland and Eastern Pomerania and completely liberated the age-old Polish lands of the Nazi invaders, in advancing to the closest approaches to Berlin.

The 16th AA, from 14 January through 31 March, made 48,222 combat sorties. Here the main efforts of the army (75 percent of the sorties) were aimed at carrying out missions directly for the ground forces (bombing and strafing enemy troops and objectives, air reconnaissance and the covering of the troops). The troops of the front constantly felt the fire support from the aviation both in breaking through the enemy defenses as well as in actions in the operational depth and particularly during the pursuit of retreating enemy troops.

The second mission of the AA during this period was to fight to keep air superiority. The AA pilots carried out 1,033 air battles and in fierce clashes shot down 814 enemy aircraft. Moreover, 59 aircraft were destroyed at enemy airfields. Such high losses for Nazi aviation not only seriously undermined its might but also the morale of the German fliers in the concluding battle for Berlin, where air superiority was maintained totally by Soviet aviation.

The most important condition for the combat successes of the AA as before was the high patriotic upsurge of all the personnel inspired by the Communist Party to most rapidly and the Great Patriotic War. The personnel in the course of combat showed intrepidity, heroism and self-sacrifice. The military skills of the aviators during the fourth year of the war increased so much that they could carry out any missions under the most difficult situation. The personnel of the air commanders who were able to control aviation under various combat conditions also developed significantly. As a whole the AA was further strengthened and was capable of providing effective support to the troops of the front during the concluding operation of the Great Patriotic War.

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## CHAPTER 5: THE BATTLE FOR BERLIN

### Ready for the Offensive

The brilliant operations of the Soviet troops at the outset of 1945 ended with the encirclement and destruction of large enemy groupings on the approaches to Berlin. Our troops were confronted with the historic mission of completing the defeat of the Nazi army, capturing the capital of fascist Berlin and victoriously terminate the Great Patriotic War.

For carrying out this historic mission, the troops of the First Belorussian Front (commander Deputy Supreme Commander-in-Chief Mar SU G. K. Zhukov) in cooperating with the adjacent fronts were to crush the Berlin grouping of Nazi troops and in a short period of time to conquer Berlin.

The German Command in the Berlin sector had created a strong grouping. In the area of the offensive of the First Belorussian Front 175 km wide there were more than a half million troops, over 5,000 guns and mortars and around 860 tanks and assault guns. On the approaches to Berlin the enemy had created three defensive zones up to 40 km deep, and around Berlin there were external, internal and city defensive perimeters which had trenches, firing positions, centers of resistance and antitank trenches based on the system of lakes and the Spree River.

By the start of the operation, the troops of the First Belorussian Front included eight combined-arms and two tank armies as well as the 16th AA.

By the start of the preparations for the operation, the fighting strength of the AA consisted of the 3d bak, the 6th and 9th shak, the 3d, 6th and 13th iak, the 183d (as part of the 3d bak) and 221st bad, the 9th Guards and 242d nbad, the 2d and 11th Guards shad, the 1st Guards, 282d and 286th iad, the 176th Guards iap (part of the 265th iad), the 16th odrap, the 72d orap, the 93d and 98th okrap and the 62d Guards trap of the GVF.

In the course of the preparations for the operation, arriving from the reserve of Headquarters for the air army were the following: The 6th bak under the command of Maj Gen Avn I. P. Skok consisting of the 326th and 334th bad (commanders, Cols V. S. Lebedev and F. D. Belyy); the 1st Guards iak headed by Lt Gen Avn Ye. M. Beletskiy consisting of the 3d and 4th Guards iad

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(commanders Col I. I. Ivanov and Maj Gen Avn V. A. Kitayev); the 113th (as part of the 6th IAD) and 188th IAD, the 240th IAD (commanders, Col M. S. Finogenov, Hero of the Soviet Union Col A. I. Pushkin and Maj Gen Avn G. V. Zimin).

As a total the 16th AA had 28 air divisions and 7 detached air regiments by the start of the operation. The AA had 3,033 flying combat aircraft, including 533 daytime bombers and 151 night bombers, 687 assault planes, 1,548 fighters, and 114 reconnaissance and correction aircraft. There were 2,738 battleworthy crews in the army. No operational field force of the Air Force during the entire war had such a large fighting strength as the 16th AA by the start of the Berlin Operation.

In addition to the 16th AA, also involved in the Berlin Operation were the 4th AA of the Second Belorussian Front on the right and the 2d AA of the First Ukrainian Front on the left, as well as 800 aircraft of the 18th AA of the Long Distance Aviation and around 300 airplanes of the Polish Air Force. This entire grouping consisted of 7,500 combat aircraft. Their operations were coordinated by the commander of the Air Force, Chief Marshal Avn A. A. Novikov.

The enemy aviation in the Berlin sector opposite our three fronts had 3,300 combat aircraft which were part of the 6th German Air Fleet as well as the Reich Air Fleet which combined all the German air defense forces. In the zone of the First Belorussian Front, from the air reconnaissance data, up to 1,700 aircraft were expected, including 1,200 fighters and 300 bombers.

Although in terms of the number of aircraft the 16th AA surpassed the German Luftwaffe by 1.8-fold, however it still represented an impressive force. The German aviation in the Berlin sector was 70 percent fighters. Many fighter units were armed with FW-190 aircraft which could be also used as assault planes. The aviation was based at its own main, well-equipped airfields. For covering the Berlin sector, the enemy had concentrated around 370 anti-aircraft batteries and had deployed an extensive network of warning and guidance radars.

The Nazi Command endeavored to use jet aircraft and cruise missiles against the Soviet troops. However this equipment was imperfect and did not make any essential changes in the situation. The fliers of the 16th AA were ready to combat it.

In preparing for the Berlin Operation, the 16th AA at the same time continued to cover the concentration of troops, to fight against enemy aviation, to make strikes against enemy troops and defensive objectives, as well as carry out air reconnaissance missions.

The basic struggle on the ground and in the air during this period continued for the Kustrin bridgehead which the Nazis endeavored to eliminate no matter what. The units of the AA endeavored to support the troops on the bridgehead. Over the period from 1 through 13 April, for these purposes,

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regardless of the frequent fogs, 1,800 sorties were made, 22 air battles were carried out and 18 enemy aircraft were shot down.

Many tasks fell on the air scouts in preparing for the operation. They detected troop groupings, reserves, the basing and number of enemy aviation and they established the nature of enemy defenses in the zone of the forthcoming offensive, beginning from the Oder and up to the Elbe. Air reconnaissance was carried out with a frequency of three-five times a day. The zone of the offensive by the troops of the front, including Berlin, was photographed six-eight times, and this helped to establish the system of defenses and the disposition of the fascist troops. The enemy airfields were photographed almost daily. The aerial photographic materials were used for compiling intelligence maps and plans which were issued to the commanders of companies, batteries and air regiments.

In preparing for the operation, the army carried out 2,600 sorties for reconnaissance. The air reconnaissance data were of great value for the command and staffs of all levels.

The command of the AA gave great attention to organizing the interaction of aviation with the group troops and between the branches of aviation. According to the plan of the operation, all of the assault plane formations for cooperation were assigned to armies of the front strike grouping. For the period of breaking through the enemy defenses, the assault plane formations in operational terms were put under the commanders of the combined-arms armies, and with the commitment of the tank armies to the breach they were shifted to their commanders. Thus, all the armies of the strike grouping of the front were provided with assault aviation which at any moment could provide them with support in combat.

For the period of the operation, interacting air formations and units were also determined.

The commanders and staffs of the air formations, having obtained instructions on the procedure for coordinating with the ground troops and between the branches of aviation, worked out coordination plans jointly. Then the commanders of the air formations and units and also the group leader commanders travel to the forward edge for becoming familiar with the terrain and the disposition of the targets.

The combat missions were given to the commanders of the air formations 5 days before the start of the operation. The concentrating of aviation at the operational airfields was carried out gradually, during a period of 4-5 days. The ferrying flights were carried out at altitudes of not more than 300 meters. The operational airfields of the fighters and assault planes were not more than 10-20 km behind the front line. Basic attention was given to camouflaging the airfields and countering enemy air scouts.

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The control of the aviation during the operation was organized considering the making of strikes against the enemy in direct proximity to the advancing troops so that the troops could make maximum use of their result for advancing, particularly in breaking through the enemy defenses. For more precise control of the aviation over the battlefield, the commanders of the cooperating air formations were to stay at the command points of the army commanders (corps commanders). Moreover in the sector of the main strike 6 km from the leading edge, an auxiliary command post was organized, and the deputy commander of the AA, Gen A. S. Senatorov, was sent here.

Due to the fact that large numbers of fighters were to be used for fighting against enemy aviation in the Berlin Operation, upon the instructions of the commander of the 16th AA, a centralized radar system was deployed for improving their control, and this system consisted of an army and two corps guidance centers (under the 3d and 13th iak), and each of them had two-three radars.

The system provided an opportunity for the commander of the AA to constantly know the situation in the air and to respond promptly to changes in it, when necessary increasing the fighter forces where the enemy aviation showed greater activeness. The commanders of the air corps could more successfully fight to maintain air superiority over the battlefield.

The command, the political bodies, the party and Komsomol organizations of the 16th AA during the preparations for and in the course of the Berlin Operation carried out enormous work to strengthen the morale and explain to all the army personnel the significance of this operation, the aim of which was the victorious conclusion of the Great Patriotic War.

The basis of their work in the units was to indoctrinate a tactically intelligent, bold, loyal and disciplined air fighter who was ready for fierce battles against a strong and perfidious enemy.

The agitation and propaganda were organized in accord with the missions of each branch of aviation. The fighters were required first of all to be able to locate the enemy and destroy it no matter what the cost. At the airfields, around the airplanes, in the dormitories and in the messes posters were hung up with the inscription: "Fighter! Hit the enemy for sure, from a close range!" This appeal reminded the fighter pilot of his duties constantly.

The main mission of the bombers and assault planes was to locate the target and hit it precisely. In propagandizing this demand the political apparatus and the party organizations of the 3d iak, the 6th shak and the 2d Guards shad showed initiative.

The air formations and units held conferences to generalize the experience of previous battles with the participation of former fliers and meetings of the Heroes of the Soviet Union with young fliers and representatives of the ground forces with the aviators.

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By the start of the offensive, the military council of the front had sent an appeal to the soldiers and officers of the troops stating:

"The troops of our front during the Great Patriotic War have fought a difficult but glorious path. The colors of our units and formations are wreathed with the glory of victories won over the enemy at Stalingrad and Kursk, on the Dnepr and in Belorussia, at Warsaw and in Pomerania, in Brandenburg and on the Oder... By the glory of our victories, by sweat and our blood we have won the right to storm Berlin and be the first to enter it, and the first to pronounce the terrible words of the severe sentence of our people for the German invaders. We urge all of you to carry out this mission with your inherent military valor, honor and glory. Forward to Berlin!"<sup>1</sup>

The rear of the 16th AA began preparations for the Berlin Operation back in March. By that time the rear services included nine RAB (4th, 5th, 21st, 25th, 28th, 36th, 56th, 79th, 80th). At the outset of the operation the 17th RAB arrived for reinforcements. In the 10 RAB there were 72 bao, 9 detached motor transport battalions and 6 detached airfield engineer battalions. Every 3 bao served an average of 4 air regiments.

The operations of the AA required 18,500 tons of ammunition and 19,000 tons of fuel. By the start of the operation, the army had, respectively, 16,600 and 15,300 tons. The lacking quantity of ammunition and fuel was to be delivered in the course of the operation. For this all sided and tanker motor transport (420 vehicles with a capacity of 920 tons) was organized into external supply columns of 15-20 vehicles each and these were directly under the chiefs of the RAB. Each bao was left 11 vehicles, and the RAB had from 30 to 80 vehicles. Available to the chief of the army rear services as a reserve were two motor transport battalions for aiding the RAB which could not handle the deliveries. Such a method of centralized use of the motor transport ensured the delivery of fuel and ammunition for the entire operation.

By the start of the operation the AA had 162 airfields, including 8 with a man-made landing strip and the rest were dirt. This met the needs of the army.

The entire personnel of the air engineer service had to make a great effort in preparing for the operation. Due to the unstinting labor of the young specialists, mechanics, technicians and engineers as well as the well organized work of the entire service, the number of aircraft out of commission in the army by the start of the operation was reduced to 4.7 percent.

In accord with the Headquarters Directive of 1 April, the plan for the offensive of the troops on the First Belorussian Front consisted in making

<sup>1</sup> Arkhiv MO SSSR, folio 368, inv. 6476, file 539, sheet 24.



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a powerful frontal strike which would split the entire Berlin grouping into several parts, the capturing of Berlin and the reaching of the Elbe River on the 12th-15th day of the operation. The main strike was to be made from the Kustrin bridgehead by the forces of four combined-arms armies (47th, 3d and 5th Shock and 8th Guards) and two tank armies (1st and 2d Guards).

The 16th AA was given the following basic missions: In maintaining air superiority, to reliably cover the troops of the front and the crossings; during the artillery softening up process, to disrupt the control of enemy troops in the tactical defensive zone; at dawn to assist the troops in breaking through the main defensive zone, the committing of the tank armies to the breach and their actions in depth; to conduct enemy reconnaissance. In accord with these missions, the commander of the 16th AA took a decision and the staff elaborated a plan for the combat use of aviation the brief content of which came down to the following.

During the night of 16 April, prior to the start of the offensive, to disrupt the control of enemy troops by attacks by the 9th Guards and 242d nbad (120 sorties) against the staffs and communications centers ahead of the front of the 5th Shock and 8th Guards armies.

With the start of the offensive, the basic efforts of the AA were to be shifted to assisting the troops of the 3d and 5th Shock and 8th Guards armies in breaking through the enemy defenses. Here the 2d Guards shad, the 6th and 9th shak (854 sorties) were to directly escort the infantry. Then the enemy strongpoints located in depth were to be destroyed by the forces of the 3d bak (336 sorties) in the zone of the 5th Shock Army and by the forces of the 6th bak, the 188th and 221st bad (309 sorties) in the zone of the 8th Guards Army. The 6th and 1st Guards iak, one iad of the 13th iak, the 1st Guards iad, one iap from the 282d Division and the 286th iad (1,098 sorties) were assigned for covering the troops and aviation in the zone of these three armies.

With the approach of the tank armies and corps to the battlefield, the main efforts of the AA were to be shifted to supporting their commitment to battle and actions in the operational depth. For these purposes the 2d shad and a portion of the forces from the 6th iak (240 sorties by assault planes and 120 by fighters) were assigned for the 9th Tank Corps of the 3d Shock Army; the 6th shak, the 3d bak and the 3d iak (respectively, 369, 180 and 937 sorties) for the 2d Guards Tank Army; the 9th shak, the 6th bak and the 188th bad, the 1st Guards iak, one iad of the 13th iak and the 286th iad (600, 304 and 1,091 sorties) for the 1st Guards Tank Army.

For supporting the northern and southern auxiliary groupings of the front, the following were assigned: A portion of the forces from the 2d Guards shad and the 273d iad (160 and 176 sorties) for the 47th Army, and the 11th Guards shad and the 282d iad (392 and 204 sorties) for the 69th Army.

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The mission of combating enemy aviation in the air was entrusted to: the 3d iak in the zone of the 5th Shock Army and the 2d Guards Tank Army, and to one iad of the 13th iak in the zone of the 8th Guards Army and the 1st Guards Tank Army. In addition, the 240th iad was assigned for combating enemy aviation by free hunting for enemy aircraft and destroying them.

As a total on the first day of the operation, the 16th AA was to carry out 8,126 sorties, of which 3,991 were to be made by the assault planes and bombers and the remainder by the fighters.

Since the front was to start the offensive 2 hours before dawn, upon the decision of Headquarters in addition to the two nbad of the 16th AA, the night operations would involve the light night bombers of the 4th AA for participating in the air softening up process and the heavy bombers of the 18th AA for air support of the troops during darkness.

Thus, the basic efforts of the 16th AA, in contrast to actions in other operations, were aimed at maximum support of the ground troops directly on the battlefield in order in the shortest time to crush the strongest tactical enemy defenses standing on the path to Berlin.

Up to 90 percent of all the forces of the AA were to be used in the sector of the main strike to be launched from the Kustrin bridgehead, and for supporting the main strike grouping of the ground forces. Only in this manner would it be possible to ensure the successful start and subsequent development of the offensive of our troops.

More than 70 percent of all the forces of the AA (20 air divisions out of the 28) had been assigned for strong and continuous air support of the tank armies and corps in this operation, since the crucial role had been given to the actions of mobile formations. Precisely they would be the first to break into Berlin.

The presence of a sufficient number of fighters in the AA made it possible to assign entire air formations for countering enemy aviation in addition to covering the ground troops. Such a decision led to the rapid defeat of Nazi aviation.

The plan for the combat use of the 16th AA was worked out only for one day, since it was assumed that the main zone of enemy defenses would be broken on the first day of the operation. Subsequently the air formations were to operate in accord with the decisions of the command of the front and the situation.

By mid-April the formations and units of the 16th AA were fully prepared for the operation.

#### The AA in the Concluding Battle

Prior to the start of the offensive of the troops of the First Belorussian Front against Berlin, on 14 and 15 April the battalions of the divisions in the first wave carried out a reconnaissance in force and this made it possible to clarify the troop groupings and the configuration of enemy defenses.

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Units of the 16th AA during these 2 days, in supporting the troops, attacked the enemy weapons and infantry in the main defensive zone, they combated its aviation and carried out numerous reconnaissance missions to clarify and adjust the available data. On 14 and 15 April, the AA carried out 1,152 sorties, including 170 for bombing and strafing the enemy troops, and 250 sorties for air reconnaissance. The fliers of the army carried out 48 air battles and destroyed 38 enemy aircraft.

The reconnaissance in force confused the German command. It took the actions of the reconnaissance units as the unsuccessful start of a general offensive by our troops.

The combined-arms armies of the shock grouping of the front went over to the offensive at 0500 hours on 16 April Moscow time after air and artillery softening up.

The air softening up of the offensive involved light bombers from the 4th AA. During the first half of the night they suppressed the destroyed enemy weapons and troops ahead of the front of the armies launching the main strike. As a total they made 440 sorties.

During the artillery softening up, 109 aircraft from the 9th Guards and 242d nbad attacked the enemy staffs and communications centers in the main sector.

With the troops going over to the attack, the operations of the heavy night bombers of the 18th AA commenced against the strongpoints in the second zone of enemy defenses. For 42 minutes the defenses were subjected to continuous strikes by 743 bombers which dropped 884 large-caliber bombs. Here the average density of the bomb strike in the area of the targets was 50 tons per km<sup>2</sup>.

With dawn the 16th AA began operations. However a morning fog covered many airfields and did not make it possible to carry out the planned concentrated strikes. Visibility did not exceed 1,000 meters and for this reason only the assault planes operated in small groups during the first hours, in suppressing and destroying enemy weapons and troops on the battlefield. But even these limited operations provided help to the advancing troops. Thus, around midday units of the 80th Rifle Corps of the 5th Shock Army fell under heavy artillery fire from the region of Diedersdorf and were forced to stop. Summoned by the commander of the 198th shad Col V. I. Belousov who was at the command post of the rifle corps, the first to arrive were nine assault planes under the command of Capt Sorokin and having formed a circle, subjected the German artillery batteries to uninterrupted attack. The subsequent groups of assault planes finally suppressed the enemy fire. Our troops moved forward and captured the enemy positions.

Later the commander of the 80th Rifle Corps wrote: "The 198th shad played a major role in ensuring the success of the rifle units. The assault planes cleared the path for the infantry, in destroying and suppressing the enemy

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firing points and artillery. Often they operated 300 meters away from our advancing troops, in completely suppressing enemy resistance. The groups appeared quickly and promptly over the target."

For the purpose of continuous support of the advancing troops under the conditions of bad weather, Gen Rudenko decided to allow the assault plane groups returning from missions to land at any airfields of the AA which were not covered by fog, to take on fuel and ammunition there and again take off for attacking the enemy. The new targets were indicated to the assault planes in approaching the combat area. The commanders of the air formations were also given the mission of carrying out continuous weather reconnaissance and with the slightest improvement in it to send out air-plane groups for combat.

Regardless of the difficult weather conditions, the continuous attacks of the assault planes neutralized the enemy weapons and pinned enemy infantry to the ground, clearing the path for the advancing troops. The bombers attacked the more distant objectives such as enemy strongpoints, highway junctions and reserves.

A participant in the battle for Berlin, the former commander of the 241st bad Col A. G. Fedorov in his book "Do Poslednego Starta" [Until the Last Take-Off] thus describes the actions of the bombers on that day:

"The 241st Air Division sortied to support the offensive of the 5th Shock and 8th Guards armies soon after the ending of the artillery softening up. Some 72 Pe-2 aircraft and around 100 fighters from the 1st Guards iad took off. An impressive and stirring picture!

"With a deterioration in the weather on the way the column of nine split up into elements and continued ahead. On the approaches to the designated targets, we fell under heavy antiaircraft fire. Eight airplanes sustained damage and four of them dropped out of the formation. But the remainder continued on and dropped their bombs on the target. The divebombers carried out their mission....

"On the way back to groups of nine Pe-2 came under attack by Fokker-Wulfs. The Guards fighters hurried to help. Particularly good were the actions of the group led by Maj Ya. Varlov. Lts Ol'kin, Solomin, Postyna and Borisenko each destroyed one fighter, and Lt Ivanov shot down two.

"In the second half of the day, the division made a new attack against the strongpoints. In beginning his dive at the target, the airplane of Lt K. V. Tsarev was hit by enemy fighters and black smoke trailed the aircraft. Regardless of the commander's order to leave the formation and return under cover to the airfield, pilot Tsarev made one other pass on his burning aircraft and in the dive covered the target in bombs. At this moment the navigator Hero of the Soviet Union S. Ya. Fil'chenkov was severely wounded by the explosions of an antiaircraft shell. Lt Tsarev turned back to his territory and with enormous risk approached the Oder. Soon thereafter he landed

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the aircraft on a small field which 30 minutes previously had still been in German hands. The first to jump out was the gunner-radioman A. Krivochenkov. He and the pilot pulled the navigator out and moved him away. There then followed an explosion which destroyed the remnants of the aircraft."

After midday the weather improved and the intensity of attacks by tactical aviation began to rise. At 1500 hours, over 600 airplanes of the AA were still in the air. The air formations extended their actions with full force endeavoring to carry out the designated missions.

The troops of the front in the main sector during the day broke the first defensive zone of the enemy and reached the second, the Seelow Heights, where they encountered stubborn resistance. During the peak of the battle the assault planes of the 9th shak led by the deputy commander of the 33d Guards shap Hero of the Soviet Union Maj N. I. Belavin, in supporting the offensive of the 8th Guards Army, dropped by parachute into the position of its battle formations four meter-long keys similar to the historic keys from Berlin which were presented to the Russian troops during the Seven Years War of 1756-1762. Each of them carried the text: "Guardsmen friends, forward to victory! We are sending you keys from the gates of Berlin!" They symbolic keys had been manufactured by workers at the Leningrad Plant imeni Kirov and were sent with the order: "Open the gates to Berlin and thereby accelerate victory over Nazi Germany!" This combat appeal caused inspiration and a new influx of forces among the advancing units.

For intensifying the strike of the attacking troops the commander of the front decided to commit the tank armies to the engagement without waiting for the defenses to be broken by the combined-arms armies. The basic efforts of the 16th AA were focused on supporting the actions of the troop formations as well as the combined-arms armies fighting in the area of the Seelow Heights.

Here all eight divisions of the army's daytime bombers as well as the 6th and 9th shak began operating with full force. The bombers destroyed the strongpoints and road junctions, having made around 1,200 sorties during the day. The assault planes suppressed the weapons and destroyed personnel in the enemy's defensive zone. They made around 800 sorties. The bombers and assault planes provided tangible support for the ground forces. In particular, the crews of the 3d bak dropped 350 tons of bombs on enemy strongpoints. Fliers from the 9th snak destroyed and damaged around 90 artillery weapons and 70 motor vehicles, they blew up 9 dumps and destroyed a large number of Nazis.

At this time the 2d and 11th Guards shad were operating on the right and left wings of the front for supporting the troops of the 3d Shock and 69th armies. They destroyed enemy artillery and mortar batteries, other military equipment and personnel in the zone of the offensive of our troops, having carried out 530 sorties.

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With an improvement in the weather, enemy aviation began to put up strong resistance in the air and endeavored to bomb our troops and the crossings over the Oder in groups of 15-20 Fokker-Wulfs. During the day the army warning system counted around 600 enemy aircraft in the air. However the attempts of fascist aviation to reach our troops were unsuccessful. The fighters intercepted the enemy aircraft over their territory due to the excellent work of the radars and the guidance centers.

With the start of the offensive by the troops of the front, successful combat operations were begun by the 13th iak led by Gen B. A. Sidnev. The fliers of the corps during the day carried out 48 air battles and destroyed 62 fascist aircraft. The fighters of the 283d iad won 42 victories. Three German airplanes were shot down by Hero of the Soviet Union Capt N. A. Naydenov, and two each by Maj Chaplinskiy, Sr Lts V. M. Oganegov and I. D. Tkachenko, Lt V. Ye. Tret'yakov and Jr Lt G. A. Chirkov. The commander of the 347th iap Lt Col P. B. Dankevich, Hero of the Soviet Union Maj V. A. Bashkirov, Maj A. A. Yefremov and V. I. Shuin, Capt V. N. Korshunov and many others each destroyed one enemy aircraft.

The fliers of the 3d iak also achieved great successes on the first day of the operation. In 43 air battles they destroyed 50 fascist airplanes. Here is one of these clashes.

A flight of Yak-3 from the 291st iap under the command of Sr Lt A. V. Ivanov was covering troops in the region of Alt Friedland and Seelow. Soon thereafter it was targeted from the ground to an enemy group numbering up to 25 fighters flying at 500 meters lower, and it immediately attacked them from behind. Sr Lt A. V. Ivanov and Jr Lt S. M. Sokolov immediately shot down one Fokker-Wulf each. The new group of Soviet fighters which had hurried in also engaged the enemy aircraft and, having destroyed several fascists, and did not permit them into the combat area of our troops.

On this day the fliers of the 176th Guards iap (commander Hero of the Soviet Union Col P. F. Chupikov) particularly distinguished themselves, and they, in carrying out free hunting over the very point of the offensive of our armies, in the area of Seelow, Munchenberg and Bernau, carried out 10 air battles and destroyed 16 Fokker-Wulfs without losing a single aircraft. The guardsmen Capt Kornev, Sr Lt N. S. Rudenko and Lts V. V. Alekseyev and K. K. Bachilo each had two victories in the air.

The commander of the 5th Shock Army Gen N. E. Berzarin, in observing the air battles of our fighters, toward evening sent the following telegram to the command of the 3d iad: "I would like you to commend the fliers of your corps who fought excellently under difficult weather conditions in supporting the troops and the crossings over the Oder on 16 April 1945."

On 16 March the fliers of the 234th iad also fought successfully. In 8 air battles they shot down 11 German aircraft. Here 8 victories were won by the fliers of the 133d iap Capt I. P. Nechipurenko, Lts S. S. Gromov, S. S. Yegorov, V. G. Lazarev and V. A. Sitnikov, Jr Lts V. P. Gaydukov and M. V.

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Degtyarev. The first day of the operation was completed with the same result by the fliers of the 286th iad. Distinguishing themselves in battle were the commander of the 721st iap Lt Col I. G. Trilevich and his fliers Capts A. S. Kobisskoy and A. P. Lipatov, Sr Lt A. K. Bomko, Lts A. F. Isayev, K. S. Kolyshkin, I. K. Moroz and V. G. Semenov.

All in all the fliers of the 16th AA conducted 140 air battles and shot down 165 enemy fighters. Our combat losses were less.

At the end of the day the enemy sent five cruise missiles and four Ju-88 aircraft filled with explosive against ground targets, but they had no influence on the actions of our troops.

As a total on the first day of the operation, the 16th AA carried out 5,342 combat sorties, including 2,521 for bombing and strafing the troops, 2,610 for covering the troops, aviation and combating enemy aviation and 211 for air reconnaissance. This was the largest number of sorties by the army in a single day in the entire war. Around 80 percent of all the sorties were carried out to support the main grouping of troops on the front. Some 1,500 tons of bombs were dropped on the enemy.

On this day the personnel of the army worked under great stress. As an average each bomber crew made more than 2.4 combat sorties, over 2.1 for the assault plane and 2 sorties for the fighter. Since with each sortie the number of battleworthy crews in a unit always declined somewhat, many fliers and navigators had to make 3 or even 4 sorties a day. The large number of sorties required very intense work at the airfields from all the technical and service personnel.

As a result of the battles on the first day of the offensive, the main strike grouping of the front advanced 3-8 km. The Seelow Heights, the key position in the second defensive line, remained with the enemy.

In the evening, reports arrived from air reconnaissance on the movement of large troop columns from around Berlin toward the front. Around 200 Il-4 aircraft from the 18th AA were sent out for attacking them at night. The movement of the columns was disrupted. At the same time the heavy bombers continuously operated against the strongpoints and battle formations of the enemy troops on the Seelow Heights, in carrying out around 570 sorties.

On 17 April, the troops of the front continued the offensive. Fierce battles broke out in all sectors. At a price of great effort the troops of the armies in the main attack grouping broke through the 2d defensive line, they captured the Seelow Heights and advanced 6-13 km during the day.

In the morning the AA, because of fogs and low solid clouds which limited visibility to 500 meters, were able to support the troop offensive only in small groups of airplanes. The planned concentrated attacks against enemy defenses on the Seelow Heights were not carried out. In the second half of the day the weather in the center improved somewhat, but further south as before remained extremely unfavorable.

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The AA bomber corps because of the absence of visibility were unable to carry out their missions. The 29 bombers of the 6th bak which took off for a mission did not reach the target and were forced to turn back. The actions of the 3d bak, the 9th shak and the 11th Guards shad were limited to just several sorties for weather reconnaissance. The desire of the air commanders and the personnel to carry out the set missions was high, but the bad weather grounded the airplanes.

Of the bombers, only crews from the 188th and 221st bad made it through to the combat area of the 3d and 5th shock armies. In small groups they made several strikes against enemy artillery in the region of Wriezen, Diedersdorf and Liezen and against strongpoints in Alt Rosenthal, Trebnitz, Gelsdorf, having made 129 sorties.

The assault planes from the 2d Guards shad and the 6th shak, in supporting these armies, made 68 sorties destroying enemy artillery and infantry on the path of our troops.

Our fighters during the day carried out 35 air battles against enemy aviation and destroyed 46 enemy aircraft. The fliers of the 6th and 13th iak each had 11 victories in the air. Sr Lt A. P. Filatov and Lts L. N. Demin and N. P. Kavkazskiy each shot down two aircraft. The commander of the 176th iap Hero of the Soviet Union Lt Col V. N. Makarov, Sr Lts V. I. Aleksandrov, A. P. Glomadin, K. M. Krasitskiy, V. V. Potemkin and I. I. Khokhlov, Lts A. A. Vinogradov, M. A. Divkov and A. P. Yerosinin, Jr Lts A. G. Zakharov, Kalinin and others each destroyed one aircraft.

Many air battles developed with numerical enemy superiority. Much courage and skill was required in order to achieve victory under these conditions.

At the end of the day the commander of six fighters from the 30th Guards iap Sr Lt A. P. Filatov, in escorting assault planes, received information from the guidance radio that at an altitude of 2,000 meters to the east was a large group of aircraft. Soon he saw up to 50 bomb-laden Fokker-Wulfs in the air. Having left two fighters to escort the assault planes, Filatov ordered the remaining two elements to attack the enemy head-on and from the flank. For the enemy this attack was a surprise. In the ensuing battle our fliers destroyed four fascist fighter bombers. The remainder, having disrupted their formation, turned back. The attack on our troops was not carried out.

On the same day, two fascist aircraft were shot down by the precise bursts of the famous Soviet flier twice Hero of the Soviet Union Maj I. N. Kozhedub. During free hunting in an element to the west of the Oder, I. N. Kozhedub encountered up to 40 FW-190 aircraft which were flying each with bombs. In climbing away from them he turned and at maximum speed caught up with and attacked from behind and above the trailing airplane which immediately exploded in the air. The fascists were confused and our fighter group which had arrived, in taking advantage of this moment, in an instance disrupted their battle formation. On the way back I. N. Kozhedub caught another Fokker-Wulf and shot it down at point-blank range.



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In addition to Maj I. N. Kozhedub, on 17 April, victories in the air were also won by his comrades in the 176th Guards Regiment Majs D. S. Titorenko and A. S. Kumanichkin, Capt N. I. Savin and Lt S. V. Kramarenko, each of whom destroyed one Fokker-Wulf.

By the end of the war, Maj I. N. Kozhedub had made 330 combat sorties, he had carried out 120 air battles and destroyed 62 fascist airplanes, holding first place among Soviet aces in terms of the number of enemy aircraft shot down. The motherland highly praised his combat feats. On 18 August 1945, he was awarded the title of thrice Hero of the Soviet Union. Col Gen Avn I. N. Kozhedub continues to serve in the Air Force.

In describing the heroic deeds of our courageous aviators, we cannot help but mention those who along with the fliers and their commanders forged the victory and inspired the air fighters in the AA to defeat German fascism. These were the chiefs of the political departments of the formations including the deputy commanders for political affairs Cols V. S. Akimov (1st Guards iad), N. D. Anan'yev (3d iak), A. P. Dergunov (3d bak), M. M. Drobinskiy (11th Guards shad), A. S. Koshelev (282d iad), D. I. Nikulin (6th iak), A. S. Nikul'shin (13th iak), A. V. Pirkin (9th shak), P. M. Tupanov (6th shak), M. P. Chuyanov (301st bad) and G. A. Sherokhin (283d iad), Lt Cols B. I. Diper (3d Guards shad), F. I. Zhurbenko (9th Guards nbad), M. G. Marin (286th iad), V. V. Reut (193d iad), N. K. Fedorov (234th iad), A. A. Shibanov (241st bad), and others. In being constantly in the midst of the masses, by all forms of political work they mobilized the personnel of the air formations to carry out their duty to the motherland in an exemplary manner.

On the long and difficult path to victory, the commanders were constantly aided by their basic deputies, the chiefs of staff of the air formations Gen I. L. Vlasov (3d bak), Cols I. V. Vasil'yev (6th iak), I. T. Voinov (3d Guards shad), P. G. Yermakov (9th shak), P. S. Ivanov (11th Guards shad), P. S. Kiselev (13th iak), I. M. Kuz'min (301st bad), S. V. Romanov (241st bad), S. Ye. Romanov (273d iad) and Ya. A. Fakov (6th shak), Lt Cols V. S. Doliyevskiy (1st Guards iad), M. F. Krotov (283d iad), V. V. Markov (234th iad), L. S. Okipchits (283d iad), G. A. Ponomarenko (286th iad), G. V. Tomshenkov (9th Guards nbad), and others. Each chief of staff was the right hand of the commander in organizing and controlling combat. Their activities were always marked by unflagging energy, creative initiative, preciseness and efficiency.

On 17 April, the units of the 16th AA due to bad weather made only 885 sorties, including 228 for bombing and strafing enemy troops. Some 273 aircraft overflights were counted for the enemy.

On 18 April, the main shock grouping of the troops of the front, having overcome the evening before the second line of enemy defenses in the area of Wriezen and Liebbeniechen, continued to develop the offensive to the west. Along the entire front the enemy put up fierce resistance throwing its reserves into battle.

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During the night 255 heavy bombers from the 18th AA again attacked enemy reserves moving up to the front. At this time two nbad from the 16th AA were attacking enemy troop accumulations in making 138 sorties during the night.

In the morning the fog and low clouds with rain as well as the smoke hanging over the battlefield prevented air operations. After midday the weather improved and the AA units intensified their activities.

The Nazis also made use of the better weather. They threw all the air forces into fighting against the advancing troops. Bomber groups appeared in the air and these endeavored to break through to the battle formations of our troops. Strong barriers of enemy fighters were thrown up in the path of our aviation. During the day the radars recorded around 700 overflights of enemy aviation. Fierce battles developed in the air.

The bombers of the AA began operations in the second half of the day. The crews of the 3d bak in groups of seven-nine aircraft from altitudes of 1,200-1,800 meters, under the cover of the 1st Guards iad, destroyed enemy strong-points ahead of the 5th Shock and 2d Guards tank armies, and also neutralized enemy troops in the regions of Munchenberg, Furstenwalde, Tiefensee and Herzfelde. The fliers made 130 sorties and dropped 90 tons of bombs. The bombers lost three crews.

The 188th and 221st bad provided substantial help to the 69th Army. They attacked enemy artillery batteries, tank concentrations and motor vehicles and infantry on the path of our troops. Their actions were highly regarded by the commander of the 69th Army Col Gen V. Ya. Kolpakchi who sent the telegram: "On behalf of my troops I would like to commend the bombers of Cols Pushkin and Buzylev who were operating in the area of Alt Malisch, Altzesdorf and Debberin." The bombers of the 221st bad in carrying out the missions encountered the strongest resistance of enemy fighters and antiaircraft and suffered heavy losses. Seven crews did not return to their airfields.

During the day the assault planes of the 6th shak supported the 5th Shock and 2d Guards tank armies and attacked enemy troops in the region of Gaselberg, Sternebeck, and Strausberg, having carried out 393 sorties. The 9th shak destroyed tanks, artillery and infantry concentrations in the area of Buckow, Arensdorf and Liezen, supporting the advance of the 8th Guards and 1st Guards tank armies. In addition, the assault planes attacked Strausberg airfield where eight enemy aircraft were destroyed.

The 2d Guards shad in small groups aided the troops of the 47th Army in the stubborn battles for the strongpoint of Wriezen, and also supported the troops of the 3d Shock Army. When the 9th Guards Tank Corps on the morning of 18 April resumed the offensive in the region of Kunersdorf, it encountered heavy fire from the enemy. It was impossible to move further. At 0900 hours three groups of six IIs from the 2d Guards shad under the command of Hero of the Soviet Union Maj V. F. Khokhlachev appeared over the battlefield. Upon the request of the commander of the tank corps, the fliers by radio

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were retargeted to the artillery and mortar batteries impeding the advance of the 23d Tank Brigade. The assault planes reformed into a closed circle and divebombed the designated targets. In carrying out five passes, they suppressed the enemy fire and destroyed many Nazis. As a result the brigade crossed the water barrier without losses and made it possible for the entire tank corps to successfully cross the Friedlanderstrom River. As a total during the day the 2d Guards shad carried out 256 sorties.

The assault planes of the 11th Guards shad attacked enemy troops in the zone of advance of the 69th Army in making 199 sorties. Here very able actions were carried out by eight guardsmen under the command of Hero of the Soviet Union Maj D. I. Smirnov. They destroyed artillery and mortar batteries and enemy personnel in the region of Alt Malisch, Niederesar and Altzesdorf.

As a total during the day the shad destroyed 40 tanks and assault guns, 109 guns of field and antiaircraft artillery, 418 motor vehicles, they blew up 7 ammunition dumps, and suppressed the fire of 78 batteries. In addition to this the fascists suffered heavy losses in personnel. In air battles the assault planes destroyed 8 FW-190 aircraft. From the enemy fighter and antiaircraft fire the assabult planes lost 9 crews during the day. Some 11 Il-2 aircraft were hit, but a majority of their crews soon returned to the units.

The fliers of the AA in the fierce battle against German aviation on 18 April carried out 162 air battles and destroyed 151 enemy aircraft. This was one of the heaviest combat days.

In these battles the fighters of the 3d iak played the basic role. During the day they carried out 833 sorties and in 84 dogfights shot down 76 enemy aircraft. For the corps the results of the day were a record for the entire period of its participation in the Great Patriotic War. During the day each pilot averaged 3.7 combat sorties. This meant that many of them had to take off for a combat mission 4-5 and more times and in virtually every sortie engage in air battles with the enemy.

Capt S. N. Morgunov and Sr Lt I. G. Kuznetsov particularly distinguished themselves. They each shot down four enemy aircraft. Capts V. V. Kalishnikov and Ye. F. Tuzhilin and Jr Lt V. S. Tkachenko each destroyed three enemy aircraft. Two fascist airplanes were shot down by Maj V. S. Baskov, Capts K. S. Vakulenko, A. A. Karayev, N. I. Savin and A. N. Sitkovskiy, Sr Lts N. A. Borovskiy, N. V. Borodin, V. V. Kablukov, M. Ye. Pivovarov, N. S. Rudenko and D. I. Suslov, Lts I. G. Vannikov, M. I. Dydygin, I. F. Krivobok, M. N. Mikhin, K. V. Podburtnyy, L. V. Prikhod'ko and V. N. Yarinskiy, Jr Lts S. V. Badenov, A. A. Nesterenko and N. P. Nikonov. After the end of the war Maj V. S. Baskov was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. He had carried out 293 combat sorties and had won 15 victories in the air.

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Here are several combat episodes. In the middle of the day the element of Lt V. I. Aleksandryuk (176th Guards iap) in La-7 aircraft was carrying free hunting in the area of Munchenberg. At an altitude of 4,000 meters, the fliers encountered around 40 Fokker-Wulfs with bombs flying under the cover of four Messerschmitts. Our fighters, having the advantage in height, suddenly attacked the cover group from above and behind and immediately shot down two enemy aircraft. The other enemy element quickly escaped and abandoned the planes it was escorting. In making use of this, Aleksandryuk attacked the leader of the Fokker-Wulf group and set his aircraft on fire. The battle formation of the German planes was disrupted and they turned back. Thus, two guardsmen, in making skillful use of their advantageous position, shot down three enemy aircraft and did not allow the remainder to reach the area of our troops.

In the second half of the day the corps radars detected up to 35 enemy bombers and assault planes traveling toward the combat area of our troops. At this time six planes from the 43d iap were in the air nearby. The group commander Sr Lt I. G. Kuznetsov led the fighters to an interception. In hiding in the clouds, our fliers by a surprise attack disrupted the enemy battle formation and forced it to drop the bombs on its own territory. In the course of the battle the group commander and the fliers I. F. Cherenkov and N. T. Gribkov shot down four German aircraft.

Sometime later the approach of over 30 enemy aircraft was spotted. For intercepting them Gen Savitskiy raised 40 fighters. By bold attacks they prevented the Nazi aviation from reaching our troops. Lts S. N. Morgunov and A. F. Vas'ko each shot down two aircraft in this battle. In May 1946 the former was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. During the war he had made 234 combat sorties and in 68 air battles had shot down 22 enemy aircraft.

On this day four fighters from the 402d iap under the command of Lt R. I. Ishkhanov distinguished themselves. In the region of Trebnitz, they encountered eight Fokker-Wulfs and immediately attacked them. In the first attack Ishkhanov shot down one FW-190. Then as a result of a 5-minute dogfight he and Jr Lt N. M. Khristinin each destroyed one other enemy aircraft. After this the Nazi fliers one by one dropped out of the battle and took cover in the haze.

The fliers of the 6th iak, in supporting assault planes, on 18 April carried out 21 air battles and destroyed 27 enemy aircraft. Here three airplanes were shot down by Lt N. A. Brodskiy, and two airplanes were destroyed by Lt Col Kh. M. Ibatulin, Majs N. F. Kuznetsov and M. P. Rents, Capt A. I. Chetvertkov, Lts Akulenko, Yu. T. D'yachenko and N. F. Yevseyev, and Jr Lt R. M. Davydov. The squadron commander of the 30th Guards isp Maj M. P. Rents later was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. During the war he carried out 246 combat sorties and in 56 air battles personally shot down 18 enemy aircraft and 5 others in group action.

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Four planes from the 30th Guards iap headed by regimental commander Lt Col Kh. M. Ibatulin were covering assault planes to the west of Wriezen. At an altitude of 1,200 meters, our fliers encountered up to 80 FW-190 traveling in groups of 8-10 aircraft. A majority of them was carrying bombs under the wings. In taking advantage of the fact that there were many aircraft in the air and that this circumstance made it difficult for the enemy to assess the existing situation, Lt Col Ibatulin attacked the Fokker-Wulfs and immediately shot down one and then a second enemy aircraft. The other man in his element Jr Lt P. N. Denisov also succeeded in shooting down one Nazi flier who tried to reach the tail of Lt Col Ibatulin. When their fuel was gone, our fighters dropped out of battle and returned to their airfield.

On the same day, Lt A. F. Lyakishev at the head of four fighters from the 273d iad, in escorting 5 Il-2 in the region of Koselberg, saw around 70 FW-190, 400-500 meters below them. He immediately attacked the leader of one of the groups and set his aircraft on fire. Lyakishev's example was followed by his comrade Lt V. Ye. Kitayev and Jr Lt P. F. Nikulin, and they both shot down one Fokker-Wulf. Our fighters and assault planes and no losses in this battle.

Capt A. I. Chetvertkov, in heading eight Yak-3 from the 234th iad in escorting assault planes, encountered up to 30 Fokker-Wulfs and 20 Messerschmitts near Strausberg, and engaged them in a fierce air battle. Our fighters shot down 9 enemy aircraft without suffering losses.

The fliers of the 13th iak also fought successfully. In 40 air battles they destroyed 25 fascist aircraft. The commander of the 176th iap Hero of the Soviet Union Lt Col V. N. Makarov won his next battle in the air. The six Yak-3 led by him in the region of Seelow at an altitude of 3,000 meters encountered eight Fokker-Wulfs and engaged them in combat during which Makarov and Maj Yefimov each shot down one enemy fighter.

As a total during 18 April, the 16th AA under the conditions of variable weather carried out 4,032 sorties, including 1,560 to bomb and strafe the enemy troops and objectives.

Regardless of the fact that on this day the enemy lost 50 airplanes, there were many shortcomings in the action of our fighters. In the evening the commander of the 16th AA was forced to give the following order to the commanders of the 3d and 13th iak who had directed the combat against enemy aviation in the air: "Enemy aviation is using the tactics of reaching our troops from the east at a low-level flight. Our fighters are flying in small groups at great altitudes and this prevents the countering of the enemy aviation. Consider this and organize the struggle against enemy aviation in accord with its tactics. The fighters must be stacked in such a manner that the lower wave is at an altitude of 500-1,000 meters and drops to a low-level flight over its own territory." Subsequently the fighters began to position their battle formations at altitudes from 400-5,000 meters, the number of interceptions of enemy aircraft rose and the cover became more reliable.

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On 19 April the troops of the front continued to wage offensive battles and during the day broke through the third defensive line of the enemy in a majority of areas. On the flanks the assault groupings of the front, having encountered strong resistance from the enemy, advanced slowly to the west.

During the night the light Po-2 bombers from the 9th Guards and 242d nbad fought against enemy troops and the strongpoints of its defenses, having carried out 444 sorties.

In the morning, because of bad weather conditions (local fogs and the absence of visibility), units of the 16th AA took off in small groups. Aviation could provide active support for the troops of the front only by mid-day, when the weather had improved.

The 3d bak, in supporting the 5th Shock and 2d Guards tank armies, in 11 groups made several attacks against the strongpoints of Grunthal, Wiesental and Werneuchen, destroying weapons and personnel as well as the concentration of motor vehicles at the point of Tramme, having made 90 sorties. Some 60 bombers from the 188th and 221st bad destroyed enemy troop concentrations in the region of Schonefelde and Kagel.

The assault planes of the 6th shak on this day fought in groups of 6-10 airplanes against the strongpoint of Strausberg, artillery in firing positions and against enemy troop concentrations in the zone of advance of the same armies. The 9th shak, in supporting the troops of the 8th Guards and 1st Guards tank armies, in groups of 8-12 airplanes attacked concentrations of tanks, personnel and artillery positions, as well as the airfields of Furstenwalde and Petershagen, where 5 FW-190 aircraft were set on fire. As a total during the day, both corps carried out more than 950 sorties and destroyed 40 tanks, assault guns and armored personnel carriers, 42 artillery pieces and around 360 motor vehicles.

On this day the troops on the right wing were supported by the 2d Guards shad and the 4th Polish sad which carried out around 380 sorties. They destroyed concentrations of enemy troops and artillery in positions in the regions of Bad Freienwalde, Wriezen and Werneuchen.

The 11th Guards shad provided great help to the troops of the 69th Army in capturing the strongpoint of Alt Malisch. The infantry and tanks of the 25th Rifle Corps which were advancing in this sector encountered heavy enemy fire. Aviation arrived to help from another area and this consisted of 21 assault planes led by the commander of the 173d Guards shap Hero of the Soviet Union Lt Col N. K. Lysenko. With the approach of the assault planes, our artillery troops and infantry by the exploding of shells and rockets indicated the location of fascist tanks, artillery and infantry. The assault planes, in descending to low-level flight, for 30 minutes attacked the Nazis in making five passes. On the last pass the crews saw our infantry rise up and move forward without encountering fire. At the

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same time the commander of the air division who was observing the actions of his assault planes radioed Lt Col Lysenko: "Excellent work, go home, the infantry has gone over to the attack." Having promptly profited from the actions of the assault planes, the troops captured the strongpoint of Alt Malisch without obstacles. The subgroups of assault planes were led by Hero of the Soviet Union Capt M. I. Rummyantsev, Sr Lts V. S. Gavrilov and V. I. Sharkov. Their actions were supported by 14 Yaks from the 517th iap. As a total on this day the 11th Guards had made 160 sorties for the troops of the 69th Army.

On 19 April enemy aviation continued to put up stubborn resistance. Its activities remained high. During the day up to 570 aircraft overflights were recorded. The German Command was endeavoring by all forces to achieve success in the air at least in the most threatened sectors. But it was unable to achieve this.

In addition for combating enemy aviation on the approaches to Berlin the commander of the AA brought in the 240th iad. The division had a great influence on the successful repelling of the large enemy aircraft groups. The division was under the command of Hero of the Soviet Union Maj Gen Avn G. V. Zimin. After the war he held various positions in the Air Force. At present Col Gen Avn Zimin heads the Military Academy of the National Air Defense Troops.

The air battles on 19 April did not stop until late in the evening. Our fliers in 156 engagements destroyed 112 German aircraft showing examples of combat skill in this.

Again the fliers of the 3d iak distinguished themselves. In actively searching for the enemy in the air, they carried out 89 air battles and shot down 68 fascist aircraft. Here two victories were won by Maj S. I. Makovskiy, Sr Lt D. A. Shuvalov, Lt F. P. Savitskiy and Jr Lt V. I. Samoded. Three enemy aircraft were destroyed by each of the following fliers of the 15th iap: Capts A. N. Sitkovskiy and Ye. F. Tuzhilin, Jr Lt V. G. Prokhochik. The regiment commanded by Lt Col N. V. Isakov shot down 19 enemy aircraft over the day.

Many air battles occurred with a numerically superior enemy, however they inevitably ended in a victory for the Soviet fliers. Thus, the group of the 176th Guards iap of 6 airplanes fought against 30 Fokker-Wulfs. In the course of the battle, Hero of the Soviet Union Maj Ye. A. Azarov, Sr Lts V. A. Gromakovskiy, A. G. Gromov, G. S. Mirnov and A. Ye. Stetsenko and Lt F. A. Gerashchenko each shot down one enemy aircraft.

The fliers of the 6th iak successfully covered the troops in the main offensive. They intercepted enemy aircraft in the air and in 30 engagements destroyed 19 fascist fighters. Lt A. P. Gromov on this day shot down three enemy aircraft, and Capt V. S. Yeliseyev, Sr Lt A. P. Filatov, Lts N. Ya. Blizhin, B. N. Voloshin, A. G. Zakharov, Lobachev and Jr Lt S. S. Kozuvitkin each shot down two.

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On this day six Yak-3 from the 116th Guards iap headed by regimental commander Guards Maj V. I. Bybshev fought skillfully. To the west of Seelow, the fliers encountered 16 Fokker-Wulfs and in a fierce battle with them destroyed 4 aircraft. Victories were won by the guardsman Capt N. A. Naydenov, Sr Lt V. S. Gorban', Lt A. F. Tselkovikov and Jr Lt P. P. Klepach.

As a total on 19 April, the air formations of the 16th AA carried out 4,398 sorties, including 1,968 for bombing and strafing enemy troops and military installations and 236 for reconnaissance.

On 20 April, the troops of the front, in developing the offensive in the central sector, from a march formation broke through the external defensive perimeter of Berlin and initiated battles in its northeastern outskirts. The long-range artillery of the front made the first salvos against the fascist capital. The historic storming of the city had started.

The 16th AA continued to support the troops of the front, particularly intensely in the second half of the day when the weather improved somewhat. The main efforts of the army were directed at supporting the advance of the mobile formations.

Prior to the dawn of 20 April, the light bombers of two nbad of the army destroyed the enemy strongpoints in Grunthal, Tempelfelde, Heinersdorf, Hoppegarten and Furstenwalde, they carried out reconnaissance and scattered leaflets, having made 538 sorties.

With morning the actions of the best trained crews of the 6th bak commenced. Four groups of nine Tu-2 made a heavy strike against the artillery positions west of Stettin, that is, in the zone of the Second Belorussian Front which on this day also went over to the offensive. In the second half of the day, the bombers of the corps, in assisting the troops on the left wing, destroyed the strongpoints of Furstenwalde and Kalkberger. On this day they made 152 sorties, and the fighters escorting them from the 1st Guards iak made 150.

The 188th and 221st bad, in supporting the troops of the 69th Army, attacked the enemy artillery and mortar batteries and infantry in the region of Trep-  
lin, Diedersdorf and at the points of Rosengarten and Biegen. As a total 96 bombers sortied and also 85 fighters from the 286th iad for covering them.

During the period from 1600 to 2000 hours, the divisions of the 3d bak attacked the enemy strongpoints of Neuenhagen, Blumberg, Altlandsberg, Beeskow, Demnits and the northwestern outskirts of Frankfurt an der Oder. The bombers operated in groups of 6-9 aircraft from a horizontal flight at altitudes of 1,200-2,200 meters. They made 179 sorties, while the cover fighters of the 1st Guards iad made 127.



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The bomber sorties this day were made with bad weather. For certain young crews, these conditions were unbearable and they returned without being able to reach the target. The remaining crews in showing high flying skill and tenacity managed to reach the objectives precisely and destroyed them accurately.

The assault planes of the 6th shak continued to cooperate with the 2d Guards Tank Army and the 5th Shock Army and supported their offensive. In small groups they strafed enemy troops and their weapons and disrupted traffic on the railroads in the area of Strausberg, Werneuchen, Blumberg, Altlandsberg, and Betsow. The assault planes of the corps during the day made 376 sorties, and the fighters from the 6th iak, around 350.

The 9th shak, for supporting the 8th Guards Army and the 1st Guards Tank Army during the day destroyed enemy personnel and equipment, it prevented movements in the regions of Herzfelde, Furstenwalde and Biegen, and also attacked Kalkberger airfield where seven German airplanes were knocked out. The fliers of the corps made 169 sorties and the fighters escorting them from the 13th iak made 97.

The crews of the 2d and 11th Guards shad in groups of 4-9 aircraft attacked troop concentrations and railroad lines in the regions of Grunthal, Bernau, Altlandsberg and Arensdorf, Treplin, having made 298 sorties. Fighters from the 6th iak and the 282d iad which were covering the assault planes made around 260 sorties.

As a total the assault planes of the army during the day destroyed 11 tanks, 50 artillery pieces, 319 motor vehicles, 102 railroad cars and 2 steam locomotives. Moreover, they shot down 5 FW-190 in air battles.

During this day, a group of 14 Il-2 airplanes from the 175th Guards shap led by the deputy squadron commander Sr Lt I. F. Fateyev carried out the mission excellently. For 45 minutes the assault planes continuously attacked enemy infantry and artillery in the region of Debberin. The guardsmen fliers made eight passes, they suppressed the fire of three batteries and destroyed a large number of Nazis. Fighting particularly well were the experienced assault plane pilots, the flight commanders I. I. Shurgaya and Jr Lt F. S. Smyrin, as well as the pilots Sr Lt O. V. Moiseyev, Lt A. M. Teslenko and Jr Lts K. A. Malin, P. I. Rzhevskiy and M. I. Rogulin. In ending each pass at a maximum low altitude, they fired from a low-level flight point-blank at the fleeing fascists. After such a crushing strike by the assault planes, our infantry and tanks broke into the point of Debberin and captured it.

Toward evening, 15 Il-2 airplanes escorted by 14 fighters from the 30th Guards iap led by Maj M. P. Rents took off to strafe enemy troops. In the region of Blumberg, they encountered up to 60 Fokker-Wulfs. The enemy aircraft were traveling toward the front line in a column of groups of 10 intending to bomb our troops. Having such a great numerical superiority, the Nazis decided initially to attack our assault planes. Our fighters hurried to the defense of the IIs. In a brief but fierce air battle, the Soviet

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fliers shot down 5 Fokker-Wulfs and reliably covered the assault planes. The commander of one of the fighter groups Guards Sr Lt A. P. Filatov died in a mortal clash with the enemy. The regiment lost a remarkable flier, a courageous air fighter and a good comrade.

The communist flier of the same air regiment Maj N. F. Kuznetsov showed great valor. In the battle started up with the fascist fliers he shot down one Fokker-Wulf. Then with the propeller of his aircraft he struck the stabilizer of a second fighter and it immediately dove to the ground. In the collision Kuznetsov sustained severe contusions and the aircraft was damaged. He had to land near the enemy trenches in no-man's land. The Germans dashed to the aircraft endeavoring to take the flier prisoner. But our infantry by an attack drove off the Nazis and saved Kuznetsov.

During the day the fighters of the army, in covering the troops and escorting the bombers and assault planes, conducted 122 dogfights and destroyed 90 German aircraft. Out of this number the fliers of the 3d iak shot down 35 airplanes, the 6th iak got 33 and the 13th iak 14. In the battles Maj M. P. Rents, Capt G. K. Yeliseyev, Jr Lt Kuznetsov and Jr Lt A. Kh. Kamaltdinov each destroyed two enemy aircraft, and Capts V. M. Beyzak, L. G. Koptev and A. I. Mitusov, Lts V. P. Vashchilkin, A. S. Gerasimov, A. M. Glushko and many others each got one. The fliers of the 30th Guards iap fought particularly well; they destroyed 15 aircraft.

The 16th AA during 20 April made 4,054 sorties, including 1,828 to bomb and strafe the enemy.

For controlling the air units moving in the area of the fascist capital, two checkpoints had to be deployed: the Eastern to which was sent a group of staff officers of the AA headed by Gen A. S. Senatorov, and Northern headed by Gen B. K. Tokarev. The commanders of the air groups, in going on their missions, were to report their route to the checkpoint and receive permission for bombing (strafing) the objective. In the event of a change in the situation in the area of Berlin, the checkpoint sent the groups to a holding area, or to alternative or newly arising targets. Such a system was very essential, particularly under the conditions of poor visibility of the targets, and proved fully effective. Moreover, the numerous posts of air spotters who were on the roofs of houses helped the fliers locate targets by radio and by light signals. On 21 April the troops of the front cut the Berlin Circular Highway, and by the end of the day had entered the outskirts of Berlin and had started battles in the city itself. Thus war had arrived to the streets of that city in which it had been conceived and prepared.

During the night of 21 April, 553 heavy bombers of the 18th AA attacked the defensive centers, the troops and military equipment on the eastern outskirts of Berlin. The 9th Guards and the 242d nbad bombed enemy strong-points to the northeast of Berlin and its suburbs of Buch, Pankow and Konnigsdorf, as well as destroyed enemy troop concentrations near Furstenwalde. During the night the division carried out 174 sorties.

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During the day, because of poor visibility, the aviation operated only as elements and individual aircraft. The army bombers could not sortie at all.

During the day the assault planes of the 9th shak prepared to attack Frankfurt an der Oder, but due to the difficult weather conditions only 15 crews could carry out the mission. Fliers of the 2d Guards shad in the second half of the day made 25 sorties against enemy artillery batteries and infantry in the northwestern suburbs of Berlin.

By the evening 33 assault planes from the 6th shak under the cover of fighters from the 6th iak from an altitude of 600 meters in flights attacked the central part of Berlin and its suburb Friedrichsfelde. The fliers encountered fierce antiaircraft fire but the flak exploded above them and the aircraft were not damaged. Enemy fighters were patrolling over the city, but did not engage in combat. Probably because of poor visibility they did not notice our assault planes. Fires and explosions broke out in the city.

Enemy aviation rarely appeared over the battle formations of our troops.

On 21 April, the 16th AA made only 539 sorties, including 219 for bombing and strafing troops and objectives. In the air there were 13 air battles, in the course of which 11 enemy aircraft were shot down. We had no losses.

Over the 6 days of the offensive, the troops of the front with the active support of the aviation broke through all three defensive lines of the enemy, they overcame the external defensive perimeter of the Berlin fortified area in the sector of the main strike and commenced the battles in the suburbs of the city.

The fliers of the 16th AA during the period from 16 through 21 April made 19,250 combat sorties. Of them 75 percent were for the direct support of the troops. In the air 628 air battles were fought in which the enemy lost 575 aircraft. Air superiority was firmly held by our aviation which created an advantageous situation for the troops. The enemy was deprived of an opportunity to make effective air attacks against the battle formations of the troops and the rear. The strikes by our Air Force increased the overall degree of the fire effect on the enemy. This result was achieved at a high price. During these days the AA lost several score aircraft. However many crews returned to their units.

On 22 April the troops of the front in the sector of the main strike, having entered the limits of Berlin, broke the internal defensive perimeter and began battles for the districts of the city. The troops on the right wing successfully advanced, in enveloping the fascist capital on the northwest. On the left wing the troops developed the offensive for the purposes of cutting off Berlin from the Frankfurt-Guben enemy grouping.

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Enemy aviation did not show much activity. Obviously the enormous losses suffered by it in the preceding battles had begun to tell.

In line with the necessity of the most rapid completion of the encirclement of enemy troops to the west of Frankfurt an der Oder, the 16th AA was confronted with the mission of strengthening the support for the armies on the left wing of the front at the same time maintaining the chief forces in the Berlin sector.

In accord with this during the night of 22 April, the 9th Guards and 242d nbad destroyed enemy troops and its military equipment on the autobahn and railroad between Furstenwalde and Jakobsdorf and in Frankfurt an der Oder. During the night the divisions made 840 sorties (averaging 5 combat sorties per crew and this was a maximum effort for the operation).

The divisions of the 3d bak, having begun to support the troops of the 33d and 69th armies, in the second half of the day made two attacks each against the strongpoints and enemy troops in Frankfurt an der Oder, having carried out 244 sorties and dropped 196 tons of bombs. The crews attacked without cover, as solitary aircraft and in elements, since they had to travel a significant portion of the route in the clouds. Bombing was carried out from a horizontal flight from altitudes of 500-1,600 meters. Over the target the bombers encountered antiaircraft fire. Two Pe-2 airplanes were shot down and some sustained damage. The bombers succeeded in blowing up several ammunition dumps and causing many fires.

In the evening the command of the 69th Army sent a telegram with thanks to the fliers of the 3d bak for the active support of the troops in the battles for Frankfurt an der Oder. As a result of the heavy air strikes the enemy resistance had been weakened. On the following day the fortress city was captured by our troops.

At the end of the day, three groups of 9 Pe-2 from the 3d bak escorted by 32 fighters from the 1st Guards iad bombed central Berlin from an altitude of 2,400 meters. An explosion of great force and several fires were noted visually. Over the city the crews were fired on by antiaircraft guns but there were no losses.

Bombers from the 6th bak with six groups of 9 Tu-2 under the cover of 57 fighters from the 1st Guards iak also bombed central Berlin and dropped 97 tons of bombs, including 27 of a caliber of 1,000 kg. Two airplanes were lost by the corps from heavy antiaircraft fire.

The 188th and 221st bad in groups in 3-9 airplanes and singly under fighter cover from the 286th iad during the second half of the day attacked enemy troop concentrations and military equipment in Frankfurt an der Oder. They made 170 sorties and the escort fighters made 96. From information of the command of the ground forces, in the area of the targets many fires broke out, and a significant number of enemy firing positions was suppressed. Our infantry expressed thanks to all the fliers who had attacked objectives in Frankfurt an der Oder.

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The assault planes from the 6th shak in groups of 6-12 aircraft under fighter cover from the 6th iak attacked the regions of railroad stations and enemy troops in central Berlin and carried out 152 sorties, and the fighters made 218.

The 9th shak escorted by fighters from the 13th iak operated in small groups against enemy troop accumulations as well as against motor and rail transport in the suburbs of Berlin such as Treptow, Neukölln, Johannisst., Adlershof and in the region of Buckow, Storkow and Beeskow. The assault planes carried out 465 sorties and the fighters 260.

When our troops had reached Berlin and the battle for the city started, the situation on the ground became more complicated and even more dynamic. Since it became ever more difficult for the aviation to determine the objectives ahead of time, Gen S. I. Rudenko gave this right to the commanders of the shad who were stationed at the command posts of the rifle and tank corps. Due to this the cooperation between the aviation and troops improved.

Thus the 44th Tank Brigade of the 1st Guards Tank Army, in fighting in a forward detachment, reached the suburb of Berlin Ulenhorst and encountered heavy enemy resistance. It counterattacked continuously, endeavoring to crush the brigade before the arrival of the main forces. Aviation gave the tank troops a helping hand. Groups of airplanes called by the air representatives of the 3d Guards shad began to attack the enemy artillery and the counterattacking tanks and infantry. With such support the tank brigade drove off the attacks and held the occupied positions until the approach of the main forces.

The crews of the 6th and 9th shak during the day dropped 6,300 bombs of up to 100 kg in caliber, they knocked out much different equipment and destroyed a large number of Nazis.

The 2d Guards shad, in supporting the 3d Shock Army, in small groups destroyed enemy troops and trains in the regions of Berlin of Tegel, Spandau, Siemensstadt and Charlottenburg, having made 77 sorties. Sr Lts S. I. Zhukov and G. S. Kiselev, in leading the groups of assault planes from the 59th Guards shap, attacked enemy troops around Berlin and here destroyed a train and a field artillery battery. A group of Il-2 from the 79th Guards shad headed by Sr Lt V. A. Tyshevich destroyed two heavy artillery batteries, up to 40 railway cars and 20 enclosed trucks.

The 11th Guards shad continued to support the troops of the 69th Army and attacked enemy troops and weapons in the regions of Briesen, Bad Saarow, as well as the eastern regions of Berlin, having made 121 sorties.

The fighters of the AA on 22 April covered the troops, they provided the bombers and assault planes with escort and the boxing in of the area of their actions, and they carried out free hunting and reconnaissance. Fliers from the 3d iak conducted 13 air battles and destroyed 10 enemy aircraft. Fliers from the 6th iak in four battles shot down two airplanes.

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The 16th AA on 22 April carried out 3,864 sorties, including 2,115 for bombing and strafing enemy troops and objectives. Two-thirds of all the aviation forces supported the troops advancing in Berlin and its suburbs and those wiping out the Frankfurt-Guben enemy grouping.

On 23 April the troops of the front on the right wing continued the offensive, enveloping Berlin on the northwest. The main strike grouping was fighting for the last city defensive perimeter and in individual areas had broken into the central part of the city. The troops of the adjacent First Ukrainian Front had successfully advanced to Berlin, outflanking it from the southwest. The city was in a semicircle of the two advancing fronts.

The combat of the 16th AA was restricted by the bad weather conditions. The chief efforts were aimed at supporting the left wing of the front and at night at demoralizing actions against Berlin.

During the night of 23 April, the crews of two bad of the AA bombed the suburban areas of Berlin, Treptow and Neukölln, the Gorlitz Station, the airport and the western part of the city, dropping leaflets along the way. A total of 398 sorties were made. However due to the extremely bad weather in 86 sorties the fliers could not fully carry out the mission.

For this reason the bombers began to make their sorties only in the second half of the day. The 241st bad after 1800 hours with individual aircraft and in small groups without fighter cover bombed the road junction, the railroad station, troops and crossings over the Spree in Beeskow. The crews made 89 sorties and dropped 64 tons of bombs. As a result the highway bridge at Beeskow was destroyed as well as a large number of buildings and railroad track. Over the target the bombers were fired on by heavy antiaircraft fire. One crew did not return from the mission.

After the raid of the 241st bad, bombers of the 188th and 221st bad attacked these same objectives. They made 90 sorties, they destroyed the pontoon bridge over the Spree and stopped motor transport traffic at the road junction in Beeskow. During the day the assault planes of the 9th shak and fighters of the 13th iak also attacked the troops and trains in Beeskow. They made, respectively, 43 and 30 sorties and caused the enemy significant losses.

The 2d Guards shad during the day, in supporting the 3d Shock Army, strafed troop concentrations and trains in Berlin and in the region of Sandhausen, Kremmen, having made 76 sorties, while the fighters of the 6th iak made 90 sorties. At 2000 hours, 22 assault planes from the 11th Guards shad under the cover of 36 fighters from the 282d iad attacked the bridge over the Spree to the south of Furstenwalde. The bridge was heavily damaged.

The fighter formations during the day carried out 40 air battles and destroyed 25 enemy aircraft. Lt V. G. Yermokhin, a flier from the 265th iad, won two air victories. One aircraft was shot down by the commander of the 176th Guards iap Hero of the Soviet Union Col P. F. Chupikov, by Majs V. V. Klimov and L. N. Slizen', Capts N. D. Dugin and I. I. Shcherbakov, by Sr Lt Serov, by Lts A. A. Lazarev and I. Ye. Sidorenko, by Jr Lts I. I. Zhadam, N. P. Pryadko and many other fliers.

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The formations and units of the 16th AA on 23 April carried out 1,586 sorties, including 761 to strafe and bomb enemy troops.

On this day, prior to the start of the decisive battle for Berlin, the appeal of the military council of the front to the soldiers, sergeants, officers and generals was read in all the air units. It stated: "In front of you, Soviet knights, is Berlin. You should take Berlin and take it as quickly as possible in order to keep the enemy off balance.... To the storming of Berlin! To the complete and final victory, comrades-in-arms!"

Late in the evening of 23 April, the capital of our motherland, Moscow, saluted the troops of the First Belorussian Front which had pierced the deeply echeloned enemy defenses on the Oder and had broken into the capital of Germany, Berlin. By an order of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, along with the troops of the combined-arms formations, mentioned as particularly distinguishing themselves were the flight personnel of the 16th AA under the command of Col Gen Avn S. I. Rudenko and Lt Gen Avn P. I. Brayko, including fliers from the air formations of Gens A. Z. Karavatskiy, Ye. Ya. out the railroad bridge across the Spree at Beeskow. The assault planes made 350 sorties, and the fighters covering them from the 6th and 13th iak made around 320.

On that day the 2d Guards shad operated under the orders of the command of the 7th Guards Cavalry Corps in the area of Kremmen, Schwanebeck and Nauen, and made 60 sorties. It successfully attacked enemy artillery and troop concentrations on the path of the advancing units. The assault plane groups were led by the experienced experts of strafing attacks Maj G. G. Klimentko, Cpts I. Ya. Aydarov, V. M. Tudushin and N. I. Lunev, Hero of the Soviet Union Sr Lt G. I. Tvauri, Sr Lts A. M. Zhuglev, V. A. Milyukov, A. I. Stefanovich and M. Ya. Yakovlev.

The 11th Guards shad under the escort of fighters from the 282d iad destroyed the retreating columns of enemy troops to the south of Furstentwalde, and destroyed the crossings across the Spree in the same region. In the estimate of the command of the division, successful operations were carried out by the groups of assault planes led by Cpts B. N. Moshkov and I. N. Pronin, Sr Lts Hero of the Soviet Union G. V. Balamutkin and I. F. Fateyev and Lt M. N. Fesenko, as well as the crews of Jr Lts D. V. Borodin and N. R. Mal'kov. The assault planes made 130 sorties.

The fighters of the AA covered the troops and their assault planes, and as support for the forthcoming Salute Air Operation, units of the 3d iak attacked the airfields of Wilhelmstadt, Neuruppin and Dahlgow. At midday 14 Yak-9 fighters headed by the commander of the 812th iap Maj M. V. Vlasov strafed the airport of Wilhelmstadt at which 20 FW-190 and 7 Ju-87 had been discovered. At the airfield five airplanes were set on fire and several were damaged. The raid was a surprise for the enemy. The antiaircraft artillery did not put up resistance.

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At 1600 hours two groups of 8 Yak-9 from the same regiment led by Capts Mel'nikov and Lavrikov and one group of 8 Yak-3 from the 402d iap sortied to strafe the airfield of Neuruppin. On the way to the target they encountered two groups of enemy fighters and were forced to engage them in combat. As a result they did not reach the set airfield and strafed an alternative target. The attack on Neuruppin airfield had to be repeated the following day.

On the same day, fighters from the 265th iad successfully attacked Dahlgow airfield and they set six enemy aircraft on fire.

The fliers of the 3d iak, in addition to attacking airfields, covered the troops and carried out free hunting in the Berlin region. Here in 45 air battles they shot down 26 enemy aircraft, losing just one. Sr Lts V. A. Gromakovskiy and A. P. Kryzhanovskiy both shot down two fascist aircraft while the commander of the 812th iap Maj M. V. Vlasov, A. I. Nikishin and Capts V. I. Merkulov and N. S. Pavlushkin, Sr Lt N. K. Denchik, Lts P. F. Gavrilin, N. G. Morya and P. T. Shcheglov, Jr Lts I. M. Glazov, K. F. Molibozhko, V. I. Nikolayev and others each shot down one. The fighters of the corps also made 16 strafings of ground targets. As a total during the day they made 596 sorties.

The fliers of the 6th iak during the covering of the troops and strafings shot down 9 Fokker-Wulfs. Here Lts M. V. Kudryashev (he shot down two aircraft), A. F. Lyakishev and N. G. Mirshin, and Jr Lt N. T. Zelenin distinguished themselves.

During 24 April, regardless of the bad weather, the formations of the 16th AA carried out 2,345 sorties, including 1,081 to strafe and bomb the enemy troops. In 54 air battles, 36 fascist aircraft were destroyed. The army lost 3 aircraft.

On the following days the resistance of fascist aviation began to weaken. Having lost a number of airfields in the Berlin area and in suffering enormous losses in flight personnel and aircraft, the Nazis were deprived of the opportunity to continue the struggle against Soviet aviation on the former scale. The number of air battles declined.

On 25 April the armies of the assault grouping of the front continued to wage fierce battles in Berlin itself, encountering fierce resistance everywhere. At midday the troops of the 47th and 2d Guards tank armies to the west of Berlin linked up with the troops of the First Ukrainian Front. Thus the encirclement of the fascist lair of Berlin by the Soviet troops was completed.

The formations of the 16th AA on 25 April carried out the Salute Air Operation named thus in honor of a rapid victory. The aim of the operation was to facilitate the actions of the ground forces in destroying the enemy grouping in Berlin. By heavy air strikes there was to be the destruction of the basic defensive strongpoints, the troops were to be attacked and control paralyzed. The plan was worked out by the AA command and staff.



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The first strike against the enemy was made during the night of 25 April. Some 112 heavy bombers from the 18th AA dropped 90 tons of bombs on the center of Berlin. At the same time the military objectives of the city were bombed by the night bombers of the 16th AA which made 416 sorties.

During the day our fliers bombed the fascist capital twice. The first raid was made during the period from 1300 to 1400 hours, and it involved 413 bombers and 483 fighters. The second raid was made 5 1/2 hours later by forces of 267 bombers and 323 fighters. Participating in the operation were the bombers of the 3d and 6th IAP, they bombed central Berlin and carried out, respectively, 293 and 158 sorties. The 188th and 221st IAD attacked the southwestern areas of the city and made 85 and 144 sorties. The bombers flew to the target in regimental groups with a short time interval in the columns of nine or the elements. Bombing was carried out from horizontal flight from altitudes from 800 to 2,000 meters. As a total around 600 tons of bombs were dropped.

The 1st Guards IAP supported the 6th IAP, and made 181 sorties. The 1st Guards IAD and the 282d IAD covered the 3d IAP, and carried out 196 and 95 sorties. The 286th IAD escorted the 188th and 221st IAD having made 192 sorties.

In addition to the direct escorting of the bombers, the boxing in of the area of combat by the fighters was also organized. The fliers of the 240th IAD in carrying out this mission made 142 sorties.

The crews had to fight under difficult conditions. The center of the city was very smoky and the cloudiness impeded bombing. The enemy anti-aircraft artillery put up fierce fire, many of our aircraft sustained damage and four bombers were shot down. The enemy fighters endeavored to resist our aviation, but they were promptly intercepted by the cover fighters and not permitted to reach the bombers. And only during the second raid were three groups from the 183d IAD attacked without success by 10 Fokker-Wulfs.

In supporting the bombers and endeavoring to keep enemy fighters from them, the fliers of the 240th IAD carried out 10 air battles against the numerically superior enemy and destroyed 9 FW-190. Two of these planes were shot down by the flier of the 900th IAP Capt Golovachev. The divisional commander Gen Zimin in an element with Maj Skupchenko fought against six Fokker-Wulfs and shot down one of them, and Skupchenko hit a second one. In the following sortie, Gen Zimin along with Col Nikolayev and Maj Ye. M. Svitnev and Skupchenko set four enemy aircraft on fire in strafing Kladow airfield.

On this day the 3d IAP carried out 12 air battles. Four enemy aircraft were destroyed by Capt N. I. Savin, Jr, Lt B. A. Kuydin, Togozhkin and A. M. Rekayev. The fliers of the 1st Guards and 282d IAD shot down seven Fokker-Wulfs.

Some 10 minutes before the first bomber attack of the 16th AA against Berlin, 20 Yaks from the 3d IAP led by the commander of the 812th IAP Maj M. V. Vlasov sealed off the Neuruppin airfield where there were 32 German

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aircraft. Our fliers arrived at the target by surprise and in two assault groups led by Capt A. T. Tishchenko and V. I. Mel'nikov by diving from altitudes from 1,000 to 150 meters attacked the aircraft at the parking areas. The cover group led by Capt I. V. Fedorov, not encountering the enemy in the air, also strafed the enemy aircraft on the ground. At the airfield four aircraft were destroyed and ten damaged. Here Capt A. T. Tishchenko distinguished himself along with Lt A. D. Ivanov and Jr Lts P. M. Kiselev and M. Ya. Leykin. Our fighters did not have any losses. The regimental navigator Capt A. T. Tishchenko later on was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. He carried out 351 combat sorties and in 83 air battles shot down 16 fascist airplanes. Col A. T. Tishchenko, having become a candidate of military sciences, for many years carried out scientific and pedagogical activities at the Red Banner Air Force Academy imeni Yu. A. Gagarin; he is presently in the reserves.

The attacks by Soviet aviation against the center of Berlin were very effective. In the city there were scores of large explosions of ammunition and fuel dumps. Many military objectives and governmental buildings were destroyed. The enemy suffered great losses. The battleworthiness of the enemy troops was significantly undermined.

The successful fulfillment of the Salute Air Operation was achieved as a result of concentrating the air efforts on carrying out one major mission. Due to the careful organization and competent leadership of the actions of the air formations and to the precise and courageous execution of the combat missions by the personnel and their commanders, the operation was completed, in essence, without losses and with high results.

In addition to carrying out the air operation, the 16th AA on 25 April continued together with the ground forces of the front to destroy concentrations of enemy troops surrounded to the southeast of Berlin and in the Wendisch-Buchholz area. For this the commander assigned assault planes from the 9th shak and the 11th Guards shad. They made 424 sorties, they dropped about 7,500 bombs on the enemy and destroyed scores of tanks, 255 motor vehicles, 19 guns and much other equipment and personnel. The 2d AA was also involved in destroying the Frankfurt-Cuben enemy grouping.

As a total the 16th AA on this day made 2,979 sorties. Of this number, two-thirds of the sorties were made to bomb Berlin and to provide fighter cover. The fliers of the AA carried out 27 air battles and destroyed 20 German aircraft. During the day the army lost 14 aircraft.

On the evening of 25 April, the capital of our motherland Moscow saluted the valorous men of the First Belorussian and First Ukrainian fronts which had completely surrounded the Berlin enemy grouping. Along with the troops, the order of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief also noted the fliers of the air formations of Gens Savitskiy, Komarov and Cols Isayev and Turykin.

On 26 April, the troops of the First Belorussian Front, in using the results of the concentrated air strikes against Berlin, began to storm its central regions. The enemy put up stubborn resistance going over to numerous counterattacks.

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The Nazi aviation endeavored to bomb the battle formations of the troops of the front and it carried out reconnaissance.

During the night of 26 April, 574 heavy bombers from the 18th AA again made heavy strikes against enemy troops and military objectives in the central regions of Berlin. Simultaneously the 242d nbad of the 16th AA destroyed the strongpoints of Arensdorf and Altschadow and attacked troops on the roads having made 100 sorties.

With the start of the storming of the central regions of Berlin, units of the AA changed over to operations in small groups. The smoke from fires, from the exploding of bombs and shells rose to a height of up to 2,000 meters and greatly worsened visibility over the city. Only the best sub-units and even individual divebomber crews were sent out on combat missions. The air situation on 26 April was also complicated as a consequence of the extremely unfavorable weather conditions including low clouds which at times reached the ground.

The following examples show how difficult it was for our fliers to operate in such a situation. The 241st bad in the morning received the order: "Be ready to bomb precise targets in Berlin using the best sniper crews." And only after 1700 hours was it possible to send out several small groups and individual crews for destroying artillery in firing positions in the regions of Ruleben, Reichsportfelde and Heerstrasse.

Four Pe-2 led by squadron commander of the 24th bap Maj R. S. Suleymanov, in approaching the target under these difficult conditions, reformed in a single line. The crews made three trial runs under antiaircraft fire in order to locate the artillery and only after this did they succeed in hitting the target.

The commander of the second group of four Pe-2, Capt K. V. Kalugin, regardless of the antiaircraft fire, made five trial passes at an altitude of 600 meters but did not discover the target. The groups of Hero of the Soviet Union Capt P. M. Mizinov and Sr Lt Yu. V. Khilkov could not get through to their targets. On the way they fell into a dense overcast and were forced to turn back. The crew of Lt B. N. Mintsev became separated from the group and had a difficult time reaching the first nearest fighter airfield where he landed. Only by the end of the day did the groups of the squadron commander Maj P. N. Ksyunin and Lt I. G. Tsvetkov succeed in attacking artillery in firing positions around Reichsportfelde and the Heerstrasse railroad station. Here they exploded an ammunition dump. As a total during the day the bombers of the 3d bak made only 32 sorties.

The assault planes of the AA began their combat sorties to support the ground forces only in the second half of the day. The 9th shak in groups of eight airplanes from the 3d Guards shad under a fighter cover from the 13th iak attacked enemy troops surrounded in the region of Wendisch-Buchholz, and made 73 sorties. During the period from 1700 to 1800 hours the fliers of

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the 11th Guards shad, having made use of a temporary improvement in the weather, made a concentrated strike against the same enemy grouping near Hermsdorf. The enemy troops suffered great losses. By an order of the AA commander 21 crews returned from the mission due to the halting of actions against this grouping.

The fighters covered the troops, they escorted assault planes and carried out reconnaissance, making 635 sorties during the day. Due to the bad weather conditions, the intercepting of enemy aircraft was difficult, and in addition its fighters in every possible way avoided meeting our fliers. During the day only one air combat was carried out and it ended without result.

As a total on 26 April, the 16th AA made 1,244 sorties, including 453 for bombing and strafing enemy troops and military objectives.

During 27 and 28 April, the armies of the First Belorussian and First Ukrainian fronts waged fierce battles endeavoring to split the Berlin enemy grouping. On the right wing the troops advanced successfully toward the Elbe. To the southeast of Berlin the armies of both fronts by joint efforts continued to compress the ring of encirclement around the enemy troops.

During the night of 27 April, the crews of the 242d nbad basically carried out reconnaissance with the incidental bombing of enemy troops in the region of Schwedt and Neurupin. During the night they made 112 sorties.

On 27 and 28 April the AA bombers, because of bad weather, could not make combat sorties.

The fliers of the 11th Guards shad, in aiding the advance of the troops of the 69th Army, on 27 April from 1300 to 2000 hours in 11 groups under the cover of 60 fighters from the 282d iad destroyed enemy troops surrounded in the region of Schwerin, Hermsdorf and Munchehof. They carried out 89 sorties, they dropped around 900 bombs of different caliber on the enemy, they destroyed 13 guns and 92 motor vehicles, they neutralized the fire of 10 batteries and wiped out much personnel.

On this day units of the 1st Polish sak fought successfully. They made 227 sorties.

By the end of the day it became known that the German Command, having lost all the airfields in Berlin and nearby, was using the main promenade in the Tiergarten Park which had a concrete surface for the taking off and landing of airplanes. Upon orders of the AA commander, four outstanding crews from the 9th shak were sent there immediately and by direct bomb hits they damaged this airstrip.

One hour before darkness the sniper divebombers from the 3d bak led by the regimental commanders Hero of the Soviet Union Lt Col M. M. Voronkov and

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Col A. Yu. Yakobson, made a repeat attack against this last Nazi "airfield" which had been prepared for the event of the flight of the fascist government. Additional damage was caused to the landing strip. Subsequently fighters from the AA patrolled constantly over it and the assault planes made periodic raids.

On 28 April the weather further deteriorated and only assault planes from the 6th shak operated against the enemy troops. In small groups they made several raids against accumulations of enemy personnel in the regions of Gruneberg and Lewenberg, making 23 sorties.

In order to bring the aviation closer to the supported troops, on 28 April the 515th iap and the 193d iad were rebased to Tempelhof airfield. At this time battles were still occurring around the airfield. The first to appear over the airfield were the regimental commander Lt Col G. V. Gromov and his wingman Lt Yu. T. D'yachenko. In approaching the airfield they were fired upon by enemy antiaircraft artillery. But this did not intimidate our fighters. Dropping to a low altitude flight, they landed. Then the Nazis began to fire on the airplanes from mortars. The Soviet artillery troops neutralized the enemy fire.

On the same day operations were started from the Berlin Schonefeld airfield by the 347th and 518th iap of the same division under the command of Lt Cols P. B. Dankevich and N. G. Khudokormov. The rebasing of one of the air divisions from the 13th iak of Gen B. A. Sidnev directly in the thick of combat to the airfields of Berlin was a bold and extremely necessary measure. This immediately facilitated the providing of a cover against air strikes for our troops fighting in the city and to the west of it.

As a total the units of the 16th AA on 27 April made 809 sorties, and just 93 on 28 April. Of them 160 sorties were made to bomb and strafe enemy troops.

During 29 April, the Soviet troops waged fierce battles for the central sector of Berlin which had been turned into a strong system of centers of all-round defense. The armies on the left wing together with the troops of the First Ukrainian Front squeezed the ring of encirclement and defeated piecemeal the Frankfurt--Guben enemy grouping.

On this day the resistance from enemy aviation again rose. In the Berlin region fascist airplanes repeatedly appeared in small groups endeavoring to attack our troops. During the night solitary Ju-52 transports endeavored to deliver cargo to the grouping sealed off in Berlin. During the day the air defense posts counted 346 overflights by enemy aircraft, including 46 at night. This was the last hopeless attempt by the Nazis to aid their troops by aviation.

The basic efforts of the army were aimed at assisting the troops on the right wing of the front which had advanced to the Elbe.

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During the night the light bombers of the 9th Guards nbad destroyed a concentration of enemy troops in the regions of Falkental, Lewenberg and Gruneberg, and carried out air reconnaissance, making 191 sorties.

In the first half of the day, the 6th shak, in supporting the troop offensive on the right wing, destroyed enemy artillery batteries, military equipment and personnel as well as trains on railroads in the regions of Zedenick, Lindow, Gruneberg and Falkental. Assault planes during the day carried out 192 sorties and the fighters escorting them made 197. Groups of IIs from the 198th shad led by Capts A. S. Krillov and Skorik, Sr Lt Bondarenko and Lt Kovalenko operated excellently against the enemy troops. The command of the 80th Rifle Corps commended them.

Very effective were the actions of the assault planes from the 2d Guards shad in the zone of advance of the 7th Guards Cavalry Corps. Particularly distinguishing itself was a group of 13 crews headed by the commander of the 58th Guards shap Hero of the Soviet Union Lt Col V. D. Panfilov. It successfully neutralized the enemy firing positions around Neuschleise which were impeding the advance of our troops. The groups of Maj N. P. Vasil'chenko, Capts N. I. Lunev and S. T. Oniskevich, Sr Lts A. S. Bogdanov and G. M. Nesterevich also fought well. On this day the air division made 44 sorties. For the excellent work of the assault planes the commander of the cavalry corps commended the fliers of the 2d Guards shad.

Particularly difficult for the assault planes was the support for infantry in the central areas of Berlin in approaching the enemy centers of resistance. The threat arose of making an air strike against our own troops. In these instances the assault planes began to use trial runs. At this time the Nazis hid in the shelters, firing stopped and the advancing infantry could capture the center of resistance. Such a simulating of attacks, for example, was successfully carried out by the troops of the 9th shak. In groups of 8-12 airplanes they "attacked" the enemy in the Tiergarten Park.

Toward evening 107 bombers from the 3d bak in 12 groups under the cover of 55 fighters from the 1st Guards iad made a heavy strike against weapons and troop concentrations in the strongpoints of Guten Germendorf and Gross Mutz which were holding up the advance of the troops from the 61st Army. The crews encountered fire from the fascist antiaircraft guns and certain aircraft were damaged. Bombing was carried out from an altitude of 1,000-1,500 meters from a horizontal flight. As a total the bombers dropped 90 tons of bombs, and as a result of this great destruction was caused to the strongpoints and the fliers spotted three major explosions and many fires.

On 29 April the fighters of the army engaged in 67 air battles and destroyed 46 enemy aircraft, losing two of their own in this. The superiority of our fliers in the air was complete.

The largest number of air victories this day was won by the fliers from the 3d iak. In having as their basic mission the countering of enemy aviation to maintain air superiority, the fliers from this corps were continuously on the search. Having spotted fascist aircraft, they were intercepted

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and destroyed. During the day the fliers carried out 39 air battles and destroyed 33 enemy aircraft. Maj S. I. Makovskiy and Lts V. I. Aleksandryuk and I. D. Radchikov each had two victories in the air. Capt P. I. Maslyakov, Sr Lt G. S. Mirnov, Lts V. I. Batov and N. A. Nel'nichenko, Jr Lts N. I. Voronenko and N. N. Levchenko and others each destroyed one fascist aircraft.

On this day the 9th Guards iap particularly distinguished itself. This unit was famous for numerous air victories over the enemy on many fronts. The regiment had started its heroic history during the difficult days of the defense of Odessa. In 1942 the fliers of the regiment as part of the 8th AA defeated the fascists in the Battle of Stalingrad. Later the regiment fought on the Western Front and during the Berlin Operation became part of the 16th AA. During the war the fliers of the regiment destroyed 558 Nazi aircraft. In this regiment were 26 Heroes of the Soviet Union including twice Heroes A. V. Alelyukhin (he shot down 34 aircraft), and Amet-Khan Sultan and P. Ya. Golovachev (each destroyed 30 aircraft). The commander of this regiment of outstanding ace pilots was the Twice Hero of the Soviet Union Maj V. D. Lavrinenkov (now Col Gen Avn) who during the war won 35 victories in the air. On 29 April the fliers of the 9th Guards iap Maj Amet-Khan Sultan, Capts N. N. Tarasov and M. S. Tvelenev, Sr Lt I. D. Belokudrenko, and Lts V. K. Devyatov, N. M. Kalachik and G. D. Pukhov shot down seven fascist aircraft in air battles.

As a total on 29 April the units of the 16th AA made 1,603 sorties, including 506 to bomb and strafe the enemy troops and military objectives.

On 30 April the fierce battles continued in Berlin with their former strength. The troops of the front occupied district after district. At 1425 hours Soviet troops raised the Victory Banner over the damaged Reichstag. The battle for Berlin had come to an end. By the end of the day the remnants of the Frankfurt-Guben enemy grouping put down their arms.

The activeness of enemy aviation declined sharply. The fascist fliers merely conducted reconnaissance or timidly endeavored to provide air cover for the grouping surrounded in Berlin.

During the night of 30 April, individual crews of the 9th Guards nbad prevented the movement of enemy troops along highways and railroads to the north of Berlin and also dropped leaflets over the city having carried out 67 sorties.

Some 108 bombers from the 3d bak in groups of 6-9 aircraft from altitudes of 900-1,300 meters bombed the enemy troop accumulation surrounded to the southwest of Potsdam as well as the Rhinow Railroad Station. Some 70 tons of bombs were dropped on the enemy. At midday 54 assault planes from the 9th shak attacked this same surrounded enemy grouping.

The 6th shak, supporting the advance of the 61st Army and the 2d Guards Cavalry Corps, in groups in 4-12 airplanes and escorted by fighters from the 6th iak destroyed enemy artillery and mortar batteries, tanks, motor

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vehicles and concentrations of personnel in the regions of Nackel, Friesack and to the northwest of Berlin. The assault planes carried out 212 sorties and caused the enemy troops heavy losses. The commander of the 197th shad Col T. Ye. Kovalev and the fliers from the division were thanked by the commander of the cavalry corps Gen V. V. Kryukov. The division had also received a good response on successful operations in the preceding days from the commander of the 9th Guards Tank Corps Gen N. D. Vedeneyev.

The 2d Guards shad on this day supported units of the 7th Guards Cavalry Corps. The fliers of the division destroyed enemy troops and trains on tracks to the west of Rathenow. They made 98 sorties.

The fliers of the 1st Polish sak also were active. During the day they successfully carried out 248 combat sorties.

The fighters of the AA, in carrying out their missions, did not meet enemy aircraft in the air.

During 30 April the AA made 1,358 sorties including 464 for bombing and strafing enemy troops and military objectives and 149 for air reconnaissance.

On 1 and 2 May, the troops on the right wing of the First Belorussian Front continued to pursue the retreating enemy. By the end of 2 May, the forward detachments of the 61st Army linked up with American troops on the Elbe River. In the center as a result of stubborn battles the enemy grouping surrounded in Berlin was split and destroyed piecemeal by the troops of the front. On the morning of 2 May, the commander of the defenses of the fascist capital surrendered to our troops and upon the request of the command of the First Belorussian Front signed the order to the Berlin garrison for surrender. The mass surrender of Nazi troops and officers started. The Soviet troops had completely captured Berlin. The Frankfurt-Guben grouping was eliminated.

On these days German aviation only rarely appeared over the city. During the night of 1 May 10 air transports dropped cargo to the surrounded garrison. During the day groups of 4-6 Fokker-Wulfs several times passed over Berlin.

The units of the 16th AA on 1 and 2 May continued to provide support for the formations on the right wing of the front, they destroyed the groups of fascist troops which had broken out of Berlin and they conducted reconnaissance.

On both nights the 9th Guards and 242d nbad operating as single aircraft prevented enemy movements along the roads to the southwest of Neuruppin, and in addition they carried out air reconnaissance and dropped leaflets. The fliers of the division made 101 sorties.



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The bombers of the AA during these days did not receive any missions and were kept on the alert.

The assault planes of the 6th shak during the day of 1 May supported the offensive of the 2d and 7th Guards cavalry corps, in destroying artillery and mortar batteries in firing positions, and a concentration of infantry and motor vehicles to the southeast of Noyshtadt. Here the assault planes carried out 128 sorties and the covering fighters from the 6th iak made 91. The commander of the 3d Guards Cavalry Division commended the fliers from the groups of the navigator of the 618th shap Sr Lt G. Z. Orekhov and the squadron commander Sr Lt G. A. Panteloyev who distinguished themselves in these battles.

By the end of the day of 2 May, 14 crews from the 6th shak upon the order of the command of the 47th Army sortied to strafe enemy troops which were breaking out of Berlin.

On 1 May the fighters of the AA continued to cover their troops and support the operations of the assault planes. They carried out 11 air battles and destroyed 7 FW-190. Here two fascist aircraft were shot down by Hero of the Soviet Union Capt V. N. Yashin (233d iap). The commander of the 176th iap Hero of the Soviet Union Lt V. N. Makarov, Capt K. S. Vakulenko, Sr Lt F. M. Kostikov, Lt G. A. Pashkov and Jr Lt A. I. Odnoblyudov each shot down one aircraft. These were the last clashes with the Nazi fliers in the air. On 2 May and in subsequent days there were no encounters with enemy aircraft for air battles. The flight commander of the 43d iap Sr Lt F. M. Kostikov was later awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. During the period of the war he made 233 successful combat sorties and in 67 air battles personally shot down 15 enemy aircraft and 11 in group actions. At present he is a lieutenant colonel (reserve) and works in Moscow.

Behind the advancing ground forces, certain fighter formations of the AA were rebased to airfields to the west of Berlin, at the same time that Nazi troops continued to remain in the city and its surroundings. Because of this a difficult situation developed at times.

In the morning of 2 May an enemy group numbering up to 3,000 soldiers and officers with tanks and assault guns broke out of Berlin and endeavored to make its way across Dahlgow airfield to the west. With the appearance of such a threat the airplanes of the 265th iad based at Dahlgow airfield took off and moved to the Werneuhöhe airfield. The headquarters personnel of the 3d iak, the 265th iad, the 462d and 609th iap as well as the technical personnel of the flying units upon the alert took up an all-round defense and engaged the enemy grouping which was breaking out, blocking its path to the west. In the second half of the day several artillery batteries and 12 tanks arrived at the scene of the battle for supporting the aviators, and then infantry units from the 125th Rifle Corps moved up and together with them the personnel of the 3d iak continued to fight the enemy until the end of the day. The fliers of the 3d iak made 168 sorties in

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supporting their comrades by strafing attacks. As a result the enemy group was crushed and here 379 German soldiers and officers were destroyed and 1,450 were taken prisoner.

The second Nazi group surrounded in the forests to the west and southwest of the Wahnsee in small groups on the morning of 2 May reached the region of Stansdorf and Guterfelde where the staffs of the 13th iak, the 283d iad and the 471st and 481st bap were located. Also based there were the 56th, 116th Guards and 176th iap. The enemy was endeavoring to break through in a southwesterly direction, but the personnel of the air staffs and units blocked its way and initiated a stubborn battle. The fliers of the 13th iak made 41 sorties to strafe the enemy troops which were breaking out, destroying them with cannon and machine gun fire and with bombs. During the day the aviators were aided by the rifle units and toward the end of the day by joint efforts the enemy was crushed. In this battle 477 Nazis were killed and 1,288 were taken prisoner. However the battles in the region of the airfields of the 3d and 13th iak with new groups of Nazi soldiers fleeing from Berlin continued still on 3 and 4 May.

On 1 May, the 16th AA made 670 sorties, and on 2 May there were 311; this included 392 for bombing and strafing enemy troops and 171 sorties for air reconnaissance.

Soviet Russia celebrated the taking of Berlin with a mighty salute. In honor of the victorious soldiers of the Red Army 24 artillery salvos from 324 guns resounded over Moscow. The order of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of this great victory stated:

"The troops of the First Belorussian Front under the command of Mar SU Zhukov, with the aid of troops from the First Ukrainian Front under the command of Mar SU Konev, after stubborn street battles have completed the defeat of the Berlin grouping of German troops, and today, May 2, completed captured the capital of Germany, the city of Berlin, the center of German imperialism and the seat of German aggression...

"In the battles for the capture of Berlin, distinguished service was shown by...fliers of Chief Mar Avn Novikov, Chief Mar Avn Golovanov, Col Gen Avn Rudenko, Col Gen Avn Krasovskiy, Lt Gen Avn Savitskiy, Lt Gen Avn Beletskiy, Maj Gen Avn Tokarev, Maj Gen Avn Krupskiy, Maj Gen Avn Karavatskiy, Maj Gen Avn Skok, Maj Gen Avn Sidnev, Maj Gen Avn Dzusov, Maj Gen Avn Komarov, Col Stalin....

"In commemoration of the victory won, the formations and units which most distinguished themselves in battles for the capture of Berlin are to be presented for awarding the name of Berlin and for decorations....

"For outstanding combat I would like to commend the troops of the First Belorussian and First Ukrainian fronts who participated in the battles for the capture of Berlin.

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"Eternal glory to the heroes fallen in the battles for the liberty and independence of our motherland!

"Death to the German invaders!

"Supreme Commander-in-Chief Mar SU I. Stalin."

The defeat of the Berlin grouping of Nazi troops and the capturing of Berlin by the Soviet Army marked the conclusion of the military defeat of fascist Germany and the end of Hitler's New Order in Europe.

From 3 through 8 May, the troops of the First Belorussian Front continued the offensive in a westerly direction, destroying the isolated Nazi groups.

The formations of the AA during 3-5 May conducted limited operations. Only as before air reconnaissance was continuously carried out for the retreating remnants of the broken Nazi army which were endeavoring to more quickly surrender to the Anglo-Americans. On 3-5 May, the indefatigable scouts made 117 sorties.

The defeated enemy aviation did not appear in the air from 6 May.

Beginning on 6 May, the 16th AA did not receive any missions.

On 7 May the troops of the front along the entire area reached the Elbe River. The Berlin Operation had been victoriously concluded by the troops of the First Belorussian Front.

On 8 May, 18 pilots from the 515th iap carried out the last mission given to them in the Great Patriotic War. By direct escort they covered the flight of the English, American and French military delegations from Stendahl airfield to Berlin. The fighter group was led by the regimental navigator Maj M. N. Tyul'kin. In May 1946 for combat feats he was given the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. During the war he successfully carried out 254 combat sorties and shot down 15 enemy aircraft in 64 air battles.

At the end of the day in the Berlin suburb of Karlshorst, the representatives of the German Supreme Command signed the act of unconditional surrender of the German Armed Forces. This ended the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet people against the Nazi invaders.

In commemoration of the complete victory over fascist Germany, on the next day, 9 May, Victory Day, the capital of our motherland Moscow saluted the valorous troops of the Red Army, the ships and units of the Navy which had won this brilliant victory with 30 artillery salvos from a thousand guns. This salute was the greatest of all during the entire Great Patriotic War.

Aviation in the Berlin Operation played a very major role in defeating the Nazi troops. During the period of 14 April through 5 May 1945, the 16th AA carried out 37,565 combat sorties, and the bombers supporting it from the 18th and 4th AA made 3,479 sorties. Of this number 19,669 sorties were made for bombing and strafing enemy troops and military objectives, 7,944

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for covering troops and rear installations, and 2,957 for air reconnaissance. Thus, a majority of the air sorties was carried out for the purposes of supporting our troops in the operation. The army carried out 9,502 sorties for escorting its bombers and assault planes, and 33 sorties for the dropping of leaflets. The daytime bombers during the operation made 4,164 sorties, and the night bombers 4,317; the assault planes made 8,603 sorties and the fighters 20,481. The Po-2 night bombers operated under the greatest stress and as an average during the operation they made each 27 combat sorties.

In the course of the Berlin Operation the fliers of the army, in combating enemy aviation, carried out 989 air battles and shot down 760 enemy aircraft; 46 airplanes were destroyed at airfields.

The fliers of the Polish Air Force also fought in a close combat association with Soviet fliers. In the course of the operation they successfully made 865 sorties, they destroyed much military equipment and personnel and shot down 17 fascist in air battles. The Polish aviators made their military contribution to the overall cause of fighting the German invaders.

The attempts of the Nazi air command to put up any organized resistance whatsoever to our glorious aces appeared powerless. The Soviet aviators in the last battle endeavored to make as many combat sorties as possible. As a whole the number of combat sorties per loss (the basic indicator for the survival of the airplanes and personnel) in the Berlin Operation, due to the increased combat skill of the flight personnel and the art of the air commanders increased significantly.

The Nazi troops which comprised the Berlin garrison of many thousands of men were continuously, night and day, under attack by the red starred bombers, assault planes and fighters. The Nazis suffered heavy losses in personnel and equipment and the persons who remained alive were morally depressed.

In no other operation of the Great Patriotic War had the struggle in the air been so decisive and fierce. This can be seen from the large number of air battles, particularly during the first days of the operation, and in the enormous losses of Nazi aviation in aircraft and flight personnel.

The battle for Berlin was the most important concluding operation of the Soviet Army in the Great Patriotic War and one of the largest strategic operations of World War II. In it the Soviet people and their army under the leadership of the Communist Party demonstrated to the entire world the invincibility of the socialist state. This operation clearly manifested the superiority of Soviet military art over the military art of fascist Germany.

The Berlin Operation was characterized by the use of large air force groupings. Of them the 16th AA was the largest in terms of the number of aircraft. Regardless of the great scale of use, the command and staff of the 16th AA successfully handled the planning and leadership of combat for 8 air corps, 10 detached air divisions and 7 detached air regiments.

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The basic feature in the combat use of the 16th AA during this outstanding operation was the massing of air efforts for carrying out the most important missions. Thus, at the outset of the operation, up to 90 percent of all the forces of the AA was aimed at direct support on the battlefield for the main assault groupings of troops fighting from the Kustrin bridgehead. Out of the 28 air divisions, 20 were assigned for supporting the two tank armies the successes of which largely determined the outcome of the entire operation. Prior to the starting of the storming of Berlin, for air strikes against its central area, more than 1,100 aircraft were used at night and almost 1,500 aircraft during the day; of this number 70 percent was bombers. The principle of the massed use of aviation was also maintained in carrying out a number of other missions.

Air superiority in this operation was on the side of our aviation, and it was firmly kept until its conclusion. This was predetermined by the qualitative and quantitative superiority of Soviet aviation over enemy aviation. Moreover the combat skill of our flying personnel was much higher than among the fliers of the Nazi Luftwaffe. Our fighters shot down 6-7-fold more aircraft in air battles than they lost themselves. Here also were felt the enormous losses of enemy aviation suffered in the preceding battles on the Oder. For this reason the Nazi aviation was routed during the first 5 days of the operation basically in air battles. The fliers of the 16th AA during these days shot down 78 percent of all the enemy aircraft destroyed during the operation. Due to the air superiority of our aviation, the ground forces as well as the assault planes and bombers were reliably protected against enemy air strikes, and the fighters acquired a freedom of operation and could even strafe enemy troops on the ground.

The most important mission of the AA during the entire extent of the Berlin Operation was to support the actions of the ground troops, and this had the form of an air offensive. After the air softening up process carried out before dawn, 90 percent of all the sorties were aimed at the direct support of the troops with the start of the offensive, to supporting the commitment of tank formations to the battle and their actions in the operational depth, as well as to destroy enemy reserves which were being brought up. This provided an opportunity to give very substantial aid to the combined-arms and tank armies of the front. Here is how the combat activities of the supporting aviation were viewed by the command of the 1st Guards Tank Army: "The 9th shak which cooperated with the 1st Guards Tank Army during the entire period of the Berlin Operation carried out its work excellently. Katukov, Popel' and Shalin." The command of the 5th Shock Army and the 2d Guards Tank Army which was satisfied by the decisive and bold actions of the fliers from the 6th shak in their response also gave an outstanding evaluation to the results of their combat activity.

During all the stages of the operation the AA widely used concentrated strikes made by major air groups combined with wave operations with smaller groups. They attacked the enemy usually in direct proximity of the forward units of the front. When the weather conditions did not permit the making of concentrated attacks, small groups were employed and these continuously attacked the enemy from the air. During the period of the storming of Berlin, in a majority of instances the basic type of help for the troops was concentrated

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attacks over an area by large groups of bombers and assault planes. But such strikes were not always possible because of the difficult situation on the ground.

The actions of the 16th AA in the operation were carried out in close coordination with the ground troops. This was achieved by the assigning ahead of time of air formations to the combined-arms and tank armies, by the permanent locating of the commanders of the air formations at the command posts of these armies, and by the presence of air representatives and controllers in the formations and units which were being supported by the aviation.

During the street battles of Berlin, the maintaining of tactical coordination between aviation and advancing troops was extremely complicated chiefly due to the difficulty of identifying the targets. However aviation did everything possible to provide maximum help to the troops in defeating the Nazi garrison. Even the trial "attacks" by assault planes helped the troops in capturing individual defensive works.

In the Berlin Operation the control of aviation was organized considering the rapid assigning of missions to the formations and units as well as continuous leadership of their combat. Regardless of the operational subordination of a portion of the air forces to the commanders of the combined-arms and tank armies for a certain time, control by the AA commander over these air formations was completely maintained. When necessary he had the opportunity of retargeting these forces for carrying out other missions having notified the combined-arms commander of this.

One of the new measures in the area of the control of aviation during the operation was the centralized use of radar. This system was the most important means for monitoring the air situation, and this contributed to the more organized and effective combating of German aviation in the air. The use of this system in the Berlin Operation for controlling aviation marked the beginning of the centralized use of radar subsequently.

The victorious conclusion of the Berlin Operation was predetermined by the enormous moral-political upsurge which was felt by all the soldiers and officers of the Soviet troops, including the aviators of the 16th AA.

The high patriotic upsurge of all the personnel was a result of the great and daily work of the command, the political apparatus, and the party and Komsomol organizations of the AA. In the concluding battle it was particularly important to ensure the vanguard role of the communists and Komsomol members in carrying out the combat missions. And this was achieved. Of all the enemy aircraft shot down in air battles during the entire operation, 98 percent were destroyed by communists and Komsomol members.

The increase in the ranks of the Communist Party was proof of the high political maturity of the personnel of the AA and their correct understanding of the importance of the concluding operation. In April and May, 1,153 persons were admitted as members of the VKP(b), and 838 persons became candidate members, and 290 persons joined the Komsomol.

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The fliers, navigators and air gunners, the engineers, technicians and junior air specialists, the men and officers of the rear services of the 16th AA honorably carried out their duty to the motherland and set examples of heroism, military skill and unstinting labor in the united desire to more rapidly complete the defeat of fascist Germany.

The Communist Party and the Soviet government properly praised the feats of the aviators in the skies of Berlin. Three formations and 15 units of the 16th AA were awarded the honorary name of Berlin, including the following: The 3d bak (commander Maj Gen Avn A. Z. Karavatskiy), the 183d bad (commander Col M. A. Sitkin), the 1st Guards iad (commander Col V. V. Sukhoryabov); the 367th, 373d and 540th bap (commanders Majs B. N. Slivko and M. D. Postnov, Lt Col S. P. Prikhod'ko); the 661st and 997th nbap (commanders Lt Col V. N. Sonin and Maj A. I. Kuznetsov); the 567th, 618th, 805th, 904th and 945th shap (commanders Maj B. K. Svirs, Lt Cols I. B. Kotik and N. M. Kosnikov, Maj I. M. Karnaukhov and Lt Col I. K. Shebekov); the 176th, 368th, 518th and 774th iap (commanders Majs V. N. Makarov and A. G. Zhulin, Lt Col N. G. Khudokormov, and Maj A. A. Makogon) and the 93d okrap (commander Col K. M. Myasoyedov). The honorary name of Brandenburg was given to the 319th, 454th and 650th bap (commanders Lt Col N. G. Sutyagin, Maj N. Ye. Ostreyko and Lt Col A. A. Vdovin).

For valor, courage and the exemplary carrying out of the missions of the command, the following formations and units of the 16th AA were given decorations: The Order of Lenin to the 2d Guards shad; the Order of the Red Banner to the 6th and 9th shak, the 13th iak, the 9th Guards nbad, the 198th shad, the 128th bap, the 45th shap, the 55th and 56th Guards iap; the Order of Lenin, Second Degree to the 242d nbad, the 3d Guards shad, the 282d, 283d and 286th iad; the Order of Kutuzov, Second Degree to the 3d iak and 241st bad; the Order of Suvorov, Third Degree to the 6th and 34th bap, the 33d, 59th, 70th, 71st and 79th Guards shap, the 30th and 67th Guards iap, the 15th, 165th, 291st, 517th, 721st, 739th and 812th iap and the 98th okrap; the Order of Kutuzov, Third Degree to the 54th bap, the 43d iap, the 176th Guards and 274th iap; the Order of Alexander Nevskiy to the 64th Guards and 774th iap, to the 919th oaps [Detached Army Signals Regiment] and the 6th oasp [Detached Airfield Service Regiment].

For the exemplary fulfillment of the missions of the command and for valor and heroism shown in this by the Ukases of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet the honorary title of Hero of the Soviet Union was awarded, in addition to those already mentioned, to the commander of the 6th iak Maj Gen Avn I. M. Dzusov, the commander of the 13th iak Maj Gen Avn B. A. Sidnev and to the flight commander of the 98th okrap Sr Lt V. D. Orlov.

On 15 May 1946, the title of Hero of the Soviet Union was awarded to: Lt Col N. V. Fedorenko, Majs Ye. Ye. Ankudinov, V. A. Verkholtantsev, I. I. Kobyletskiy and I. P. Yalovoy, Capts V. S. Batyayev, P. P. Zver'kov, A. I. Lebedev, G. S. Malashenkov, A. B. Manukyan, N. D. Mishanov, N. I. Popov, G. S. Kholodnyy and S. S. Shcheglov, Sr Lts V. R. Buchavyy, Ya. I. Goncharov, D. V. Dzabidze, M. S. Kamel'chik, V. R. Lazarev, D. I. Lebedev, V. A. Leont'yev, Ya. D. Mikhaylik, O. V. Moiseyev, A. D. Osadchiyev, G. I. Puchkov,

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V. V. Udachin and A. N. Kharitoshkin, Lts D. I. Bizyayev, N. T. Muzhaylo, I. I. Nechipurenko, I. A. Perminov and V. A. Sorokin, Jr Lts S. T. Vagin, K. Ya. Malin, G. N. Shatin and MSgt G. F. Alekseyev.

On 2 June 1945, a second Gold Hero's Star was awarded to the commander of the 3d iak Lt Gen Avn Ye. Ya. Savitskiy.

Yevgeniy Yakovlevich Savitskiy was born in 1910 in Novorossiysk in the family of a railroad switchman. He began his working life as a worker in a cement plant. At the age of 19 he was sent by the Komsomol to the Stalingrad Military Pilots School and upon completing it he worked there as an instructor. He was a member of the CPSU from 1931. On the eve of the war he commanded a fighter air division in the Far East. At the beginning of 1942, he was transferred to the combat army to one of the air divisions defending Moscow. Here he participated in air battles and began his combat score of shot-down fascist airplanes.

Soon thereafter he was assigned to organize the 3d iak. Ye. Ya. Savitskiy served the entire war with this unit, defeating the fascist invaders in the battles in the Kuban', over the fields of the Ukraine and in the skies of the Crimea, in liberating Belorussia and Poland, and then right up to Berlin. In March 1943, Col Savitskiy was awarded his first general's rank. In May 1944, for personal feats and exemplary fulfillment of the missions of the command he was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. During the war Ye. Ya. Savitskiy made 216 combat sorties, he personally shot down 22 fascist aircraft and 2 others in group action. During this time the fliers of the corps led by him destroyed 1,653 enemy aircraft.

Gen Savitskiy was always where the situation was most intense. Being a flier of superior class and an excellent air fighter, he possessed unlimited boldness and valor and through his personal example he inspired the fliers of the corps to heroic feats. In understanding the situation excellently as well as the questions of the use of aviation, he always sought out new methods for fighter action which provide a victory over the enemy. His talent as a flier and military leader was most apparent in the Vistula-Oder and Berlin operations where the personnel led by him in fierce battles caused enormous losses to fascist aviation and reliably covered the troops of the First Belorussian Front. At present Mar Avn Ye. Ya. Savitskiy is the deputy commander-in-chief of the National Air Defense Troops and an honored military pilot of the USSR.

In commemoration of the outstanding victory of the Soviet Army in the concluding operation, all the personnel of the 16th AA on the behalf of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet was awarded the medal "For the Capture of Berlin." Many fliers, gunners, navigators, engineers, technicians and junior air specialists, officers and men of the rear services who distinguished themselves in battles were decorated with orders, including three persons who received the Order of Lenin, 459 who received the Order of the Red Banner and 8,845 persons who received other combat orders.



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CONCLUSION

During the hard years of the Great Patriotic War the 16th AA fought a difficult but glorious and heroic path from the Volga to the Elbe. Formed in August 1942 during the peak of the Battle of Stalingrad, the AA in close coordination with the ground forces participated in all the major operations which determined the outcome of the struggle against the Nazi invaders (Stalingrad, the Battle of Kursk, the Belorussian, Vistula-Oder and Berlin operations).

During the period of the war the AA grew in size and strength immeasurably. At Stalingrad it had around 300 combat aircraft, and in the concluding Berlin Operation its aircraft fleet now numbered over 3,000 modern aircraft.

One of the most important prerequisites for the successful actions of the Soviet Armed Forces during the operations of the Great Patriotic War was the winning and firm keeping of air superiority. In waging an intense struggle against Nazi aviation, the 16th AA along with the other AA carried out this mission.

The victory of the Soviet Air Force over Nazi aviation was determined by its continuous quantitative and qualitative growth, by the greater combat skill of the flight personnel and the art of the air commanders, and by the labor successes of the Soviet people who with inexhaustible energy supplied the front with superior military equipment.

In all the operations of the Great Patriotic War the primary mission of the AA was to provide maximum air assistance to the ground forces in the fight against the Nazi invaders. The fliers of the 16th AA carried out this mission. In all operations the largest number of sorties was made for direct troop support. In suppressing enemy weapons, the aviation blazed the trail for the troops on the offensive, it destroyed retreating enemy columns, it helped repel Nazi counterattacks, it reliably covered the troops against air strikes and carried out air reconnaissance at night and during the day.

During the years of the war the 16th AA made around 288,000 combat sorties. In this 3,700 enemy tanks, armored vehicles and tractors, up to 10,000 artillery guns and mortars, around 40,000 motor vehicles and much other

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military equipment were destroyed and damaged. In addition the enemy suffered enormous losses in personnel. The fliers of the AA carried out 6,100 air battles in which they shot down 5,175 enemy aircraft. Moreover, 766 Nazi airplanes were destroyed in raids on enemy airfields.

In the fierce clashes with the enemy, thousands of combat friends and comrades died the death of the brave. Eternal glory for the aviators who fell for the liberty and independence of our motherland. Their names will always live in the memory of the grateful Soviet people.

"During the years of the Great Patriotic War the Armed Forces of our motherland covered themselves with undying glory," said the USSR minister of defense from the rostrum of the 24th CPSU Congress. "...Not only our contemporaries but also future generations eternally will remember and honor the heroic Soviet soldier who saved the world from fascist enslavement and who ensured liberty, independence and social progress for the peoples of many European and Asian nations."

This noble mission of the Soviet Armed Forces remains unforgettable today when the Soviet Union is firmly and consistently carrying out a policy of peace.

In remembering well the lessons of the previous war, the Soviet Armed Forces created and directed by the Communist Party are vigilantly guarding the peaceful labor of our people and are always ready to carry out their patriotic and international duty.

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